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(Re)Writing Communities and Identities

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(Re)Writing Communities and Identities

**Expository Writing Program
Department of English
Kansas State University**

Sixth Edition

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Introduction

Understanding ENGL 100



Introduction to English 100

As you can see from the title of your textbook, the focus of English 100 (Expository Writing I) is threefold: writing, communities, and identities. As this is a writing class, you will be asked, of course, to do quite a bit of writing. We will use writing to express thought, to work through ideas, to communicate with others, and to respond to peers' work. Writing, then, is our primary subject. Throughout the semester, however, you will also be asked to explore how identities are created, interpreted, addressed, and represented. You will also work to better understand how your own many social identities position you within a number of communities—communities marked by gender, race, and socioeconomic class, as well as more geographically situated communities, such as the larger K-State community. As you enter ENGL 100, you also join a community of writers made up of you and your peers within this particular class, as well as the other thousand-plus students taking ENGL 100 this semester at K-State.

As part of this process, you will be asked to re-think and re-consider some commonly held assumptions about topics concerning human identity and diversity, hence the “re” in the textbook title. At the heart of education is the act of contemplating new information, often information that might not immediately support those ideas we’ve already formed. But it’s important to be able to consider new perspectives and recognize that not everyone sees the world as you do. This is not to say that to be successful in this class you need to change your views; instead, you need only be open to considering alternative viewpoints as potentially valid. We ask, then, simply that you enter into conversations with your peers, with your instructor, and with the various texts you’ll encounter with an open mind and a willingness to listen. We’ll work hard this semester to truly listen to others, especially to those with whom we disagree.



What do we mean by human identity and difference? This semester, you will be reading and writing about issues such as gender, socioeconomic class, race, and ethnicity. While you might have discussed such issues in your high school classes, and while you are likely discussing them

in some of your other college courses, complex topics such as identity and human difference are never “done” or “solved.” It’s important that we continue to think about and discuss such issues throughout our lives, deepening and complicating our earlier understandings with new information and experience.

You might be wondering why we’re discussing such topics in a writing class. On the one hand, addressing these relevant issues reflects K-State’s commitment to diversity and meets the university’s diversity undergraduate learning outcome. Additionally, understanding human difference is crucial to the act of writing itself, as no one writes within a vacuum. Instead, writers need to imagine audiences and readers who are different from themselves. Writing, as an act of communication, is, itself, an attempt to reach out across differences—differences in viewpoint, attitude, knowledge, experience, and values—and these differences are often influenced by gender, race, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, size, religion, ability, degree of able-bodiedness, and even geographical location. All of these factors impact how we make meaning, as well as how we are, ourselves, interpreted by others. Better understanding of various perspectives, then, helps us all to communicate with those who might differ or disagree with us. More productive communication across difference is one of the over-arching goals of any writing class.

Throughout the rest of this introductory chapter, you’ll learn more about the kinds of writing you’ll be asked to do in this class, the overall objectives and expectations, and about what we mean when we talk about revision. But first, a note about this textbook itself. As you might have already noticed, *(Re)Writing Communities and Identities* has been developed specifically for the ENGL 100 class here at Kansas State University. All of the readings, questions, activities, and assignments are crafted to help you meet this course’s major objectives, and many of the examples you find throughout this text are K-State specific. The examples of student writing, too, are from current and former K-State students who wrote these pieces for their ENGL 100 classes. This K-State focus is one thing that makes this book somewhat different than many of your other texts.



Strategies for Expository Writing Students

At the start of every semester, when I am teaching writing classes, I begin with these types of questions to get a sense of my students' attitudes, rituals, and experiences with writing:

- What one word or phrase would you use to describe your attitude towards writing?
- Where do you usually write?
- How do you usually write? (and, How do you usually get started to write?)
- What writing rituals do you have?
- What was your last major writing task?
- What type of writing do you like to do most?
- What was a positive (and/or negative) experience with writing?

Though my students' responses may differ from one class to the next, some generalizations I can make about the attitudes and practices related to writing are the following: not surprisingly, students report feeling more engaged with their work when they are writing about something that they are interested in; another generalization is that students may have put little thought into their writing process before; they show a tendency to wait a long time before getting started and then use the pressure and stress of the looming deadline to motivate them. A final generalization is that many students may consider revision as an opportunity to edit and "clean up" or "fix" their writing.

There are justifications for supporting these three generalizations about writing, the most important of which being that these writing processes and attitudes have proven successful in the past; in other words, students who have waited before the deadline to begin writing and who have not, therefore, considered revision, have successfully completed their written assignments.

Yet, here is the bad news: There may come a time, especially in your college career, when this writing-at-the-last-second strategy may not be successful and may not allow you to complete something that you are proud of.

The good news is this: As you'll discover in your expository writing classes, strategies exist that you can use to give yourself more time to write effectively and to reduce the stress surrounding writing. You'll be practicing several of these strategies throughout this semester.

Pre-Writing & Drafting

I come across students every semester who describe their writing process as "thinking" and then "writing up" their thoughts. Again, though this two-part process may have been successful for

them in the past, there may be a time—in particular with more complicated writing tasks—when this process will no longer be effective.

A great deal of research exists from practicing writers and researchers who demonstrate the importance of producing short and focused pre-writing bursts to enable them to get a better grasp over what they are writing about. In other words, these writers find that they cannot “think”—they cannot figure out where they are going in a draft—without first having written a lot. This type of pre-writing or early drafting is rarely shared with others, and it may take the shape of listing, clustering, brainstorming, and freewriting; additionally, many readers find that they need to research and read before they can start writing.

What these pre-writing and drafting opportunities allow is for you to begin writing earlier, before the stress of the deadline. They also allow you to distribute your writing across many short bursts. You may find it more productive to write in several twenty-minute chunks throughout the week rather than allocating a four-hour time window in which to get your entire draft completed.

These pre-writing experiences, finally, may help you redefine research and revision. You may discover that research, for example, occurs throughout the writing process, as you may need to find other people’s voices on the Internet or through the library databases to learn more about your issue or conversation. Similarly, you may find that revision occurs constantly: you’ll be starting, and then re-starting, changing, adapting, moving, rewriting, and editing and proofreading throughout your writing process.

Internal Deadlines

Your instructor will provide you with a deadline for the assignment. Given that deadline, you’ll want to work backwards, giving yourself time for a final session devoted to editing and proofreading, during which you’ll want to make sure to reread your work carefully and slowly. Before then, you’ll want to establish dates for finalizing a rough draft (a draft different from the one you give to your instructor), sharing your work with other readers, conducting research and taking notes (which should occur over several sessions), and completing other prewriting or drafting activities.



Your expository writing class may give you some of this structure, which a student of mine recently labeled as “building in accountability.” Again, the overall goal with creating internal deadlines for yourself is to begin writing earlier, enabling yourself more time to submit something that you will be proud of.

Consistent Rituals

Here is how I write: I crash through quick, almost scribbled drafts by hand (on scratch paper, usually with pencil) after an extensive period of note-taking. Directly before this first, “crash through” draft, I’ve taken a second round of notes on notes that I have already taken earlier. I work in short bursts—rarely longer than an hour and oftentimes in twenty minutes. I then wait for a day or more, go back to my crash-through drafts and, on my laptop—usually in the same space in my living room or basement—I then extensively revise and create a rough draft. Again, as I’m usually working on longer pieces, I write in short bursts and can only manage a couple of pages at a time. I’ll revise the whole draft after I have completed all of the smaller chunks.

Talk to your friends and instructors about other writing rituals that they have and, if you don’t have any yourself, begin to cultivate a few. What you’re looking to do is finding ways to write more consistently over a longer period of time.

Instructor’s Comments

One of the most important responsibilities that your instructor has is to fairly, consistently, and constructively read and evaluate your work, which means a great deal more than just assigning a grade. Of course, you’ll be interested in your grade, but do consider your instructor’s marginal comments and final comments. These can be some of the most important moments of interaction going on between you and your instructor; in your academic and professional life, it will also be one of the few times in which you receive so much thoughtful feedback from a reader.

After you have received your assignment back, spend some time re-reading it and, at the same time, making sense of your instructor’s comments. As the paper you are working on is yours—and not your instructor’s—you don’t necessarily need to act and respond to every bit of feedback, yet you should get a strong idea as to how another reader is interpreting your work. Where was your instructor confused, and what can you do to guide your readers more on the revised draft? Where was your instructor pointing out that more research, explanation, or development could occur?

In short, an important aspect of your experience in expository writing is your ability to develop the ability to reflect and read your writing from another reader’s perspective.

Peer-Review Workshops

In your expository writing classes, you'll experience peer-review workshops, when you are asked to bring a draft that you share with your classmates. There are several benefits for participating in a peer-review workshop, the first being that you are meeting one of your internal deadlines and getting more writing done before it is due. Obviously, as a writer, you'll get the opportunity to hear different perspectives on your draft and gain, hopefully, some important revision advice. At the same time, as a reader, you'll look at examples of how other students are attempting to interpret the assignment; consequently, you'll be able to internalize the assignment goals and criteria more.

Concluding Thoughts

There are other, productive strategies that you can explore, such as seeking out additional readers of your work, visiting your instructor when you have questions or concerns, or signing up for an appointment with the Writing Center. Keep on experimenting with new processes and rituals this semester in your expository writing classes.

Undergraduate Student Learning Outcomes¹

Kansas State University strives to create an atmosphere of intellectual curiosity and growth, one in which academic freedom, breadth of thought and action, and individual empowerment are valued and flourish. We endeavor to prepare citizens who will continue to learn and will contribute to the societies in which they live and work.

Students share in the responsibility for a successful university educational experience. Upon completion of their degree and regardless of disciplinary major, undergraduates are expected to demonstrate ability in at least five essential areas.

Knowledge

Students will demonstrate a depth of knowledge and apply the methods of inquiry in a discipline of their choosing, and they will demonstrate a breadth of knowledge across their choice of varied disciplines.

Critical thinking

Students will demonstrate the ability to access and interpret information, respond and adapt to changing situations, make complex decisions, solve problems, and evaluate actions.

¹ "Undergraduate Student Learning Outcomes," *Office of Assessment*, Kansas State University, 3 March 2016. *Kansas State University*, www.k-state.edu/assessment/slo/undergradobj.html.

Communication

Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate clearly and effectively.

Diversity

Students will demonstrate awareness and understanding of the skills necessary to live and work in a diverse world.

Academic and professional integrity

Students will demonstrate awareness and understanding of the ethical standards of their academic discipline and/or profession.

Principles of Community²

Kansas State University is a land-grant, public research university, committed to teaching and learning, research, and service to the people of Kansas, the nation, and the world. Our collective mission is best accomplished when every member of the university community acknowledges and practices the following principles:

We affirm the inherent dignity and value of every person and strive to maintain an atmosphere of justice based on respect for each other.

We affirm the right of each person to freely express thoughts and opinions in a spirit of civility and decency. We believe that diversity of views enriches our learning environment and we promote open expression within a climate of courtesy, sensitivity, and mutual respect.

We affirm the value of human diversity for community. We confront and reject all forms of prejudice and discrimination, including those based on race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, religious or political beliefs, economic status, or any other differences that have led to misunderstandings, hostility, and injustice.

We acknowledge that we are a part of the larger Kansas community and that we have an obligation to be engaged in a positive way with our civic partners.

We recognize our individual obligations to the university community and to the principles that sustain it. We will each strive to contribute to a positive spirit that affirms learning and growth for all members of the community.

² "Principles of Community," *About K-State*, Kansas State University, 7 June 2017. *Kansas State University*, www.k-state.edu/about/values/community.

Your Roles as a Student in an Academic Community

Now that you have joined Kansas State University as a student, you are part of a larger intellectual community: students, instructors, and professors are researching, creating, and sharing knowledge and ideas. For instructors and professors, ideas are their livelihood. In a university environment—also known as academia—ideas are considered intellectual property. Therefore, as members of this academic community you need to be respectful and responsible with another’s ideas and give credit where credit is due. To help you respectfully work with outside ideas in your papers, we will be learning how to cite sources in this course. In addition, in an intellectual community, you need to make sure that all of the work you do for all of your classes is your own. You can review the Kansas State University Honor Code in the *Student Life Handbook*.

A Word on Plagiarism...

The Council of Writing Program Administrators defines plagiarism as something that “occurs when a writer deliberately uses someone else’s language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source.”

Your *Student Life Handbook* also includes definitions of plagiarism and gives you advice for when you need to “acknowledge indebtedness”:

- Whenever you quote another person’s actual words
- Whenever you use another person’s idea, opinion, or theory, even if it is completely paraphrased in your own words
- Whenever you borrow facts, statistics, or other illustrative material—unless the information is common knowledge (William W. Watt, *An American Rhetoric* 8)

Talk to your instructor if you have any questions on how to cite properly. Please also check K-State’s Honor & Integrity System website for more information: www.k-state.edu/honor.

If it is proven that you have deliberately plagiarized a paper in an Expository Writing class, the Honor Council will be notified. Consequences could be severe, including failure of the class, required enrollment in a Development and Integrity course, or, in particularly severe offenses, expulsion from the university.

The Writing Process

Many people seem to think of writing as an individual activity. We imagine the solitary writer sitting in the back of the coffee shop, drinking espresso and furiously scribbling in his notebook. Or the novelist sitting in a dimly lit room, typing away at her keyboard. We imagine that famous writers such as Hemingway and Morrison and Faulkner simply sat down, waited for inspiration to strike, and wrote beautiful prose in one fell-swoop. In fact, Jack Kerouac (famous Beat poet and novelist) is said to have written in this way, producing what was called “spontaneous prose” that he never edited; yet, new evidence has shown that this was a myth. Kerouac, in fact, wrote multiple drafts, revised consistently and rigorously, and spent the large majority of his short adult life writing and rewriting his work. Certainly, there might be writers who write only one draft and never have readers help them revise, but the writer Anne Lamott tells her readers that every writer writes terrible first drafts. Doing so, she says “is how they end up with good second drafts and terrific third drafts.” She continues, “I know some very great writers, writers you love who write beautifully and have made a great deal of money, and not one of them sits down routinely feeling wildly enthusiastic and confident. Not one of them writes elegant first drafts. All right, one of them does, but we do not like her very much.”¹ Lamott’s point is clear: writing is a team sport.



Yes, of course the act of putting words on a blank page or screen is, ultimately, an individual act, unless you’re writing collaboratively (with someone else), and even then, at some point one of you is putting words on the page/screen at a time. And yet, our writing itself is influenced by the variety of voices and texts we’ve encountered throughout our lives. We bring forward those influences every time we come to the blank screen. It’s one of the reasons that author Stephen King says that “if you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all else: read a lot and write a lot.”² In this class, you’ll be asked to do both: read a lot and write a lot. To read is to see

³ Lamott, Anne. *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. Random House, 2007, p. 21.

⁴ King, Stephen. *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*. Scribner, 2000, p. 145.

what's possible and to begin to hear the music of language; consistently writing and revising will allow you to experiment with language, to develop and hone your skills, and to push beyond your first attempts to craft words on a page.

We've already seen the specific kinds of writing you will be asked to do, but that's only dealing with the form and goals of the end product. Writing, though, is a process that involves a number of recurring and recursive stages. Typically, we think of the writing process as having three stages—pre-writing, writing, and re-writing—but writing is actually more complicated than this three-part structure implies. It's likely more helpful to think of the “pre-writing” stage as the *invention* or *discovery* stage, and it might include the thinking you do while walking or driving to campus; the conversations you have with friends or writing center consultants that help you find a topic; the research you do in order to help you learn more about your topic; the notes you scribble (and here we see how “pre-writing” often includes writing itself); the discussions you have with your classmates, teachers, and friends about your idea and/or your plans for your essay; and other discovery techniques such as outlining, drawing, charting, clustering, etc. All of these activities help you work through ideas and learn more about your topic.



Still, that shouldn't imply that drafting itself is not also a form of thinking. Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Donald Murray says that “the act of writing is a voyage into the unknown; it's an adventure in discovering what you know, but didn't know you knew.”[#] As we'll see in Nancy Sommers' findings below, many students think of writing as transcription of thought, implying that the thinking comes first and all one has to do is put that thought onto the page. In fact, research on writing processes shows that writing actually functions *as a form of thinking itself*. Instead of imagining that you need to know exactly what you're going to say and then trying to write that down, we encourage you to use writing as a mode of thinking. You'll therefore be asked to write, at least at first, without worrying about sentence structure, word choice, or punctuation and grammar. Such writing allows you to focus, instead, on the content, and it provides you more space to simply see where the writing takes you. Within the writing process, this is generally called *drafting*. Some people call these early drafts first drafts, zero drafts, or discovery drafts. Don Murray calls these the “down drafts” because they are a place to just get everything down. Anne Lamott calls them “shitty first drafts” and says that you need to allow

⁵ Murray, Donald. *Write to Learn*. 8th ed. Thomson Wadsworth, 2005, p. 13.

yourself to write badly at first so that you can figure out what it is you need to say. Then, when revising and rewriting, you can hone that message and determine the best way to say it.



Drafting, too, can take a number of forms, including even the physical way that writers compose: some prefer to write on a computer or laptop while others still write out early drafts in longhand. One of the things that you will be asked to do in this course is to try out different forms of invention/discovery, drafting, and revision. Often students enter college (or even leave college) believing that there's simply one way of writing that works for them. They've always, for example, outlined their essays before writing them, sticking closely to that outline as they write. Some students always start with a cluster map. Other students will say that waiting until the night before an essay is due actually provides them with the motivation they need to write well. However, in this class, we will ask you to try a number of different approaches, even if they do not feel immediately natural or useful for you. The only way to learn whether or not new processes work is to try them, so we encourage you not to dismiss an activity or workshop practice simply because it's not the way you've tended to write. Your current process might be working, but another approach might actually work better, or might lead you to a different kind of writing. Learning new practices and information is, of course, what education is all about.

You will also be expected to workshop your writing with your peers and to revise regularly and often. As we note above, very few writers (nearly none) write and rewrite in solitude. Instead, they write rough drafts, revise them, rewrite them, throw them out, start over again, revise again, revise again, edit, and then send their work to a member of their writing team: usually a friendly and trusted reader to start. They revise again, rewrite, revise, and edit. They then send their work to an editor (or first to a less-friendly but still trusted reader), who helps them revise again, refining their ideas and their prose until their work is as clear, tight, and engaging as they can make it. The act of writing is, really, the act of rewriting.



It's important, then, that you understand what your writing teacher means by revision. Composition scholar Nancy Sommers is particularly helpful in this regard.⁶ To better understand how writers at different levels of experience imagine the act of revision, she interviewed first-year students at Boston University and at the University of Oklahoma, asking them to write and revise three essays, then asking them to talk about how they revised these drafts and how they understand the act of revision. Sommers also interviewed twenty experienced and professional adult writers from the same areas, having them, too, write and revise the same kinds of essays. In the table below is what the student and professional writers reported in terms of their revision processes.

Revision Strategies of Student Writers	Revision Strategies of Experienced Writers
<i>Slashing and Throwing Out:</i> "I throw things out and say they are not good."	<i>Rewriting:</i> "It is a matter of looking at the kernel of what I have written, the content, and then thinking about it, responding to it, making decisions, and actually restructuring it."
<i>Reviewing:</i> "Reviewing means just using better words and eliminating words that are not needed. I go over and change words around."	<i>Rewriting:</i> "Rewriting means on one level, finding the argument, and on another level, language changes to make the argument more effective. Most of the time I feel as if I can go on rewriting forever. There is always one part of a piece that I could keep working on. It is always difficult to know at what point to abandon a piece of writing. I like this idea

⁶ Sommers, Nancy. "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experience Adult Writers." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1980, pp. 378-88.

	that a piece of writing is never finished, just abandoned.”
<i>Redoing</i> : “Redoing means cleaning up the paper and crossing out. It is looking at something and saying, no that has to go, or no, that is not right.”	<i>Revising</i> : “My cardinal rule in revision is never to fall in love with what I have written in a first or second draft. An idea, sentence, or even a phrase that looks catchy, I don’t trust. Part of this idea is to wait a while. I am much more in love with something after I have written it than I am a day or two later. It is much easier to change anything with time.”
<i>Marking Out</i> : “I don’t use the word rewriting because I only write one draft and the changes that I make are made on top of the draft. The changes that I make are usually just marking out words and putting different ones in.”	<i>Revising</i> : “It means taking apart what I have written and putting it back together again. I ask major theoretical questions of my ideas, respond to those questions, and think of proportion and structure, and try to find a controlling metaphor. I find out which ideas can be developed and which should be dropped. I am constantly chiseling and changing as I revise.”

As Sommers notes, there’s a stark difference in the ways that student writers and more experienced writers approach revision, and even the act of writing itself. Student writers tend to be focused on words, believing that they simply need to replace words with “better” words, or cut a few words, or add a few words or sentences. In fact, during revision workshops we often hear students tell each other that they simply need to add another sentence to a particular paragraph. While that might be true, that’s not actually *revision*, but is better dubbed *editing*. Editing is the correcting, honing, and tightening of word choice, sentence structure, spelling, punctuation, and grammar. When we in the Expository Writing Program at K-State talk about revision, we mean something larger. We’re asking for students to re-see their work, often re-writing large chunks of text, or cutting full paragraphs or pages. We’re asking that students work toward what the experienced writers in Sommers’ study mean when they talk about revision: restructuring, finding the main thread of the idea that runs throughout the piece, shaping information more clearly for a reader, and clarifying larger concepts and ideas. Most experienced writers find that revision takes much longer than the original drafting stage.



In English 100, you will have the opportunity to revise the first three of the four major essays after you've received initial feedback from your instructor. While no student is required to revise their essays, all students are strongly encouraged to do so. Your instructor will provide written feedback on your essays, typically in the form of marginal and terminal (end) comments. Within our program, we ask that instructors refrain from overwhelming the page with too many comments, and we ask that they focus on what we call *higher-order concerns* of purpose, focus, development, and organization. You will not, therefore, tend to see instructors circling every grammar or punctuation error. Nor will your instructors tell you everything that might be improved in your essay. Instead, we ask that instructors draw your attention toward some of those higher-order concerns within your draft, helping you work toward substantial revision. Ultimately, though, the responsibility for revising your writing is on you, the writer. You should see your instructor's comments as a starting point for that re-envisioning and re-writing work, but you want to avoid approaching revision as a checklist in which you simply "fix" the things your instructor commented upon. Remember, when your instructors ask you to revise, they're asking *you* to re-see and re-write your essay with those higher order concerns in mind, using their comments as a useful starting point, but not as an exhaustive list of the things that you need to change.

Activity

Revision Awareness

Below you will find an example of both ineffective and effective revision, as well as an explanation for what differentiates the two. We hope this helps in clarifying what it is your instructor likely means when she encourages you to revise.

Student's first draft of paragraph

This ad is clearly about gender. There is a woman in it and she is clearly attracted to the man. She clearly wants him. They're both in an elevator and there is no one else in the elevator and the words *Be Yourself* are written across the bottom of the ad. It seems like she's supposed to want to be herself and this product will help her do it, but we all know that it won't. Advertisers just lie to sell their products.

Instructor comments on this paragraph

This is a good start, but I'm wondering how this ad challenges gender expectations. Does the woman's attraction to the man challenge gender expectations? How does the setting of the elevator work toward that challenging? Remember, too, that you don't want to fall into the "promise of the product" trap—keep your focus on how the ad challenges gender expectations and not whether or not the product will work.

Student's weak revision

This ad is clearly about challenging gender expectations. There is a woman in it and she is clearly attracted to the man. She clearly wants him. They're both in an elevator and there is no one else in the elevator so that shows their independence. The words *Be Yourself* are written across the bottom of the ad. It seems like she's supposed to want to be herself and this product will help her do it.

Question: Why is this not yet a strong revision? What has the writer done to revise? How has the writer attempted to work toward the instructor's suggestions? Where has this writer fallen short? What might this writer do instead?

Student's stronger revision

While at first this ad might seem like it's reinforcing gender stereotypes, it's actually challenging stereotypes. The man and the woman in the ad are positioned in an elevator and the woman is pushing the "stop" button. She clearly wants the man. You can tell because she's making direct eye contact with him, she has one hand on the top button of her shirt like she's about to unbutton it, and her lips are slightly parted. This is all supposed to make us think she's sexually attracted to him. This might originally seem like it's just showing that women are promiscuous, but really it's putting the woman in the power position. She's the one who is stopping the elevator and is making the moves on the guy. She is positioned slightly higher in the frame than the man, putting her in a position of power. He is backed up against the wall of the elevator, not like he's scared but like he's surprised. She is clearly the one calling the shots here.

Question: Although this is not a perfect paragraph, it is a stronger revision. Why? What makes it stronger than the previous attempt? What has the writer done here in order to address the

revision suggestions? How does this revision strategy better reflect the responses of Nancy Sommers' experienced writers?

As we noted earlier, in order to help you revise your work, you'll be participating in regular peer workshops where your classmates will read your drafts and provide verbal and/or written feedback. Students often wonder why they're asked to workshop with their peers when the instructor is ultimately the one grading the essay. Certainly, there's a logic to that way of thinking, but, as we've seen, writers need a variety of readers at different stages of their writing process. Having your peers read and respond to your work gives you an audience of real people with real informational needs. Your peers will help you identify moments in your text that are clear or confusing, interesting or a bit dull, under-developed or overly complicated. As members of your writing community, your classmates can give you real feedback geared toward the specific assignment. In this way, they can help you revise and improve your writing *before* your instructor grades it. Additionally, reading your peers' writing will help you clarify the assignment guidelines as well as see the strengths and weaknesses in your own writing.

Activity

Peer Review Workshop Reflection

Some students resist workshops, in part because they feel that workshops haven't been useful for them in the past. With that in mind, complete the following activity to help make workshops helpful for everyone.

1. Describe the last time you received feedback on a piece of writing. What was the piece of writing? Who was providing feedback? If you can't remember a time when someone commented on your writing, describe a time when someone gave you feedback on your performance at work or in school.
2. Was this feedback helpful? Why or why not? Be as specific as possible about what made this feedback helpful or not-so-helpful.
3. Thinking about your answers above, use the space below to list some characteristics of useful feedback. For example, useful feedback tends to be

specific and clear. What are at least 5 other characteristics of useful feedback or workshopping comments?

4. What characteristics of feedback are not as useful? For example, when students give really vague feedback (such as “It’s good. I liked it.”), writers tend to find that not especially useful. What are at least five other characteristics of unhelpful feedback or workshopping comments?

Revision Plans

After you’ve completed a draft, your instructor might ask you to write a revision plan. Even if she doesn’t, revision plans are a good way to remember what you need to do in order to revise successfully. There are a number of ways to write a revision plan: a bulleted list, a narrative or letter to yourself, and a weekly or monthly schedule. Below, you’ll find examples of these three methods.

Bulleted List

- Find the focus of my essay: is it primarily about masculinity or being a guy in a fraternity?
- Cut anything that doesn’t specifically support my focus
- Add more details that illustrate my point
- Develop the connections between the details and my main point.
- Outline my draft. Check for organization problems.
- Smooth out the language

Narrative/Letter

Two of my readers were confused about whether my essay is about masculinity or about being a guy in a fraternity so I need to figure out where my focus is. I think they’re probably related, but I need to focus on one of those. I’m leaning toward talking about how this particular ad shows that guys in a fraternity don’t have to act like stereotypical “guys.” I want to talk to my teacher about that, though, to make sure I’m on the right track. If that’s my focus, then I’ll need to explain what I mean by stereotypical guys and how that’s related to what most people think fraternities are like. Then I can add more examples from the ad about how it challenges that idea. One of the things I’ve been struggling with is explaining exactly how examples are showing my point, so I need to make sure I’m doing enough of that. I think I’m going to try that highlighting trick to make sure I have enough of those connecting moments.

Revision Calendar

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		3:30pm		11:30 am	
	Prepare for Workshop	Class Peer Workshop Day	9:30am Appointment with teacher	Check my sources	AM—Work more on explaining
2:00pm Finish drafting	4:30 Read over draft and make changes	4:30 pm Schedule appointment 1) with teacher to work on	11:00 Writing Center	2:00pm Work on explaining how my examples illustrate my claim.	how my sources relate to my main ideas.
3:30pm Class Practice citing sources	5:30 *PRINT 3 COPIES, PLUS SOURCES!!!	Focus 2) with the Writing Center	3:00 pm Work on focusing my introduction and adding examples	3:30pm Class 2nd Peer Workshop	Outline my draft to check my organization

Activity**Your Writing Process**

Over the last few pages, you’ve been reading about writing processes. Review that section and answer the questions below.

1. What have you learned about the writing process in the past? What did you learn about writing in high school, for example?
2. Describe your typical writing process. How do you tend to approach a writing assignment? Do you draft all at once? In chunks? Do you write it all in one day or one night? Across a week? Why do you write in this way?
3. What have you learned to value in writing? In other words, what do you think makes for “good writing” and where/how did you learn this?
4. How do you tend to revise? Does your revision process reflect what the students in Sommers’ study said about revision, or what the experienced writers said? When

was the last time you revised in the way that the experienced writers in Sommers' study recommended?

Introductory Writing Assignment

For this initial writing prompt, describe your writing experiences and attitudes and tell your instructor something important about yourself as a writer. In 500-900 words (approximately two to three double-spaced pages), respond to several of the following questions below and then, based on these experiences and attitudes, leave your instructor with a strong sense of yourself as a writer. In other words, given your previous experiences and attitudes, what larger point can you make about yourself as a writer or student?

In the top left corner, remember to include your name, your instructor's name, the name of your class, and the date. Then, centered on the page, include a title for your introductory assignment.

Here are the writing-focused questions:

- How would you describe your previous writing experiences?
- Typically, where have you done most of your writing? In English writing classes? In other classes? Outside of school?
- What do you like to write about?
- What kind of writing do you typically find yourself doing?
- What important teachers or other role models have you had?
- What ideas, attitudes, memories, or associations do you have with writing?
- How do you typically write? Where? How would you describe your writing process?
- How often do you revise? Under what circumstances?
- What strengths do you have as a writer? What weaknesses?
- How has your writing changed?
- What has been a recent substantial piece of writing you have completed? What was the context (Class? Teacher? Process?) of this writing experience?
- What sorts of activities do you prefer to do in writing classes?

Towards the end of your introductory assignment, remember to leave some space to reflect on and analyze your responses to these questions. In a paragraph or two, make sure to leave your instructor with a big point about yourself as a writer or student.

Chapter 1

Visual Analysis



Visual Analysis Assignment Guidelines

In today's information age we are bombarded with visual images relating all kinds of messages. Advertisers, entertainment groups, media corporations, advocacy groups, the government, and others create visual messages to make a point, to sell a product, and/or to illuminate an issue. Analyzing these images allows us to develop our critical thinking and analytical skills as well as enhance our media literacy, which is our ability to understand the ideas and implications of the various forms of media in our culture.

For this assignment, you will adopt the role of an image analyst for a large media outlet. Your job is to analyze one client's visual message in order to answer the question: "*How does this visual's message(s) about gender challenge or complicate society's gender expectations?*"

To do this, you will write an approximately 1200-word memo to your supervising editor that 1) identifies the image's audience and purpose; 2) explains how the image's message about gender is conveyed through its design features; and 3) explains how this message challenges or complicates social expectations.

The selection of your visual image will be an important step for this process. Many visuals present images that support social expectations of gender, so you will need to closely examine a number of visuals to identify one that works *against* social expectations or one that presents a more complicated message than the stereotypes. You will need to choose a *contemporary American* ad, one that was created within the last twenty years. To do so, we strongly encourage that you do not simply do a Google search for ads. When you find ads on Google, they are often stripped of their publication date and venue, making it difficult to know if your ad meets the criteria of this assignment.

Once you have chosen an appropriate visual, you'll need to develop your analysis effectively. This will require careful explanation of the meaningful connections that you identify between the visual's design features and concepts of gender. Your memo needs to clearly describe the relevant design features and, perhaps more importantly, explain *how* they create messages about masculinity and femininity that relate to the social system. To help you make these connections and to develop your analysis, you must also use at least one outside source (from this textbook or from outside research).

To demonstrate above average analytical skills and your critical engagement with course concepts, your memo should present ideas that are generally overlooked by the more casual viewer and should guide your audience to engaging with the visual in a new way. For example, one strategy might be to explore how the visual's gender messages relate to other social systems, such as:

- Masculinity and parenting

- Femininity and sports
- Masculinity/femininity and aging, youth, or childhood
- Masculinity/femininity and relationships

Objectives

By the end of this assignment, you should be able to do the following:

- Explain the significance of the gendered messages in your chosen visual.
- Analyze a visual message's features and explain how they target a particular audience.
- Describe the common portrayals of gender and discuss how these portrayals relate to their social constructions.
- Analyze the role visual media have in the social system of gender.
- Use sources appropriately to support your claims.
- Use correct memo format.

Rationale

The visual analysis assignment meets all of the English 100 objectives, but, more specifically, it works to help students learn to better “analyze and respond to a wide range of texts such as advertisements, websites, informative essays, editorials, and speeches.” It is also important because it asks you to meet one of the most significant objectives in English 100: to “demonstrate critical thinking when examining and analyzing human difference.” In order to fulfill these particular objectives, you will:

- Analyze how authors and designers represent human difference.
- Identify how culture and society impact the ways human beings are represented.
- Analyze how human difference is represented in a visual argument.

Analysis & Media Literacy

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1/4 Cup (30g)	
Servings Per Container About 38	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 200 Calories from Fat 150	
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 17g	26%
Saturated Fat 2.5g	13%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 120mg	5%
Total Carbohydrate 7g	2%
Dietary Fiber 2g	8%
Sugars 1g	
Protein 5g	
Vitamin A 0% • Vitamin C 0%	
Calcium 4% • Iron 8%	
<small>*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet.</small>	

The central purpose of this chapter's writing assignment is to *analyze* a visual image. To analyze something means to break it down into its different components in order to understand how it works. People analyze things all the time, though we may not always call it analysis or think deeply about what we're doing. For instance, when we taste a new food, we talk about its texture and flavor; we even try to identify the various ingredients we think we detect. By breaking down the food into categories of texture and flavor, we begin the analysis process. By dividing flavor into subcategories of ingredients, we analyze even further. We are familiar with another common usage of analysis by watching crime drama TV shows. In these shows, crime scene investigators often collect evidence, including unidentified trace evidence, such as powders or fluids. This evidence is taken back to a lab to be processed and analyzed. The lab produces an analysis report that identifies the various components of the trace evidence that, undoubtedly, allows the detectives to determine what the unidentified substance is and solve the case. Studying the various parts of—or analyzing—an object, then, allows us to learn more about the whole object. Analytical processes are used in a variety of fields. As in our TV example, analysis is used in the Sciences, but it is also used in the Humanities. Literature is analyzed; so is artwork, like paintings or sculptures. In fact, the ability to analyze can be applied in almost any line of work.

For example, analysis is an important aspect of the field of advertising. Students who take marketing and advertising classes and people who work in ad agencies regularly participate in an analytical process called critique, or crit, for short. In her book, *AD Critique*, Nancy R. Tag explains that critique is the process by which “one deconstructs an ad in order to understand it and construct something better. [...] Critique pulls the work apart, examines it, and determines if the elements make sense and if the whole comes together” (5).¹ This analytical process is an integral part of creating advertisements. Once an ad has been designed and drafted, a group of people gather for the critique. They break down the design features of the ad, discussing how it works to create the intended messages. These discussions often highlight what’s successful in the ad as well as what aspects need revision before a final version of the ad is completed. All ads, then, have been carefully constructed; all of an ad’s design features have been specifically selected and arranged to send a particular message to the viewer.

Advertisers design messages using a variety of media formats that are a part of our everyday lives. Messages appear as TV commercials, Internet and magazine ads, billboards, and posters, just to name a few. Often, the central message is quite clear while other messages are less overt. For instance, advertisements that sell diet products often use pictures labeled “before” and “after” in an attempt to demonstrate that the product was responsible for the apparent weight loss between the two images. This central claim—our product will help you lose weight—is obvious. However, this ad also suggests that viewers need to lose weight, and that the person in the “before” picture is unacceptable, while the person in the “after” photo is more desirable. Even though the ad’s message about the general importance of weight loss isn’t the main purpose or meaning, it still has an impact on people’s body image as well as on our social expectations of others. Being able to analyze all messages inherent in advertising, then, is one way to understand how our social systems are created, perpetuated, and even challenged.



Processing messages in advertisements and understanding what they mean to our lives is also one way of enhancing media literacy. The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) defines media literacy as “[t]he ability to ACCESS, ANALYZE, EVALUATE, and COMMUNICATE information in a variety of forms.”² Just as advertisers use analysis to create

¹ Tag, Nancy R. *AD Critique: How to Deconstruct Ads in Order to Build Better Advertising*. SAGE, 2012.

² “Media Literacy Defined.” NAMLE, National Association for Media Literacy Education, 4 April 2014, namle.net/publications/media-literacy-definitions/.

more effective ads, viewers can analyze media messages to better understand their purpose and value; media literacy also allows us to see how those messages can impact our lives. For example, you may have received an official-looking email in your university email inbox that informs you of a problem with your university ID. The email says that, to fix the problem, you should reply with your password or go to a specific website. To understand that this email is NOT official—that it is actually a scam to gain access to your account or to install a virus on your computer system—you have to use your media literacy skills. If you don't analyze the email carefully to appropriately evaluate its authenticity, you could put yourself at risk for identity theft or other crimes.

This chapter's writing assignment asks you to closely analyze an example of visual media. In doing so, you will further develop your analytical skills as well as your media literacy, making you less vulnerable to media with ill-intent, but also more socially aware of the implications of the various messages present in media today.

Sex, Gender, and Social Systems

As a culture, we are deeply invested in assumptions about sex and gender. For example, even before a baby is born, many of us participate in traditions and functions that revolve around knowing a fetus's sex: purchasing clothes and toys in gendered colors (pink for girls and blue for boys), elaborate "gender reveal" parties, and even inviting family members to the 20-week ultrasound when the baby's external sex organs are first discernible. As you'll see in the discussion below, despite how invested these traditions are in (binary understandings of) sex and gender, they often confuse those two terms. Your first major writing assignment will ask you to analyze a visual for how it challenges or complicates normative ideas of gender; it's therefore important to understand the differences between sex and gender. Additionally, while definitions can be limiting and often change over time, understanding common terminology can give us the language we need to begin conversations about complex cultural topics.



Sex

A person's sex is often defined by reproductive functions, presuming a biologically-based binary in which people are considered either male or female. It also suggests that we can group people into these two categories by examining their bodies, more specifically their reproductive organs.

In its most simple definition, then, our culture asserts that those who have a penis are men, and those who have a vagina are women.

While U.S. culture traditionally limits the possibilities for a person's sex to two categories (male/female), reality is not that simple; in fact, even biology is not that simple. While we have been conditioned to expect a child to be either male or female, the human body is not always easily categorized into just these two groups. Instead of thinking of sex as a dichotomy of male and female, our biological reality is more like a spectrum, with males and females who have clearly defined reproductive organs—and corresponding chromosomes and hormone levels—at each end of the spectrum, and various combinations of those biological features fitting somewhere in between. For example, a person can have what are considered female reproductive organs but XY (male) chromosomes. As most of us have never had a formal chromosomal analysis, we likely don't know for sure if our "chromosomal sex" aligns with our "physical sex." In this way, even "biological sex" is more of a social construction than we might have been led to believe.

Gender

Just as sex isn't really a binary, neither is gender; yet, in the U.S., we often associate certain behavioral and physical traits with males and females based on a cultural understanding of what we expect of men and women. Gender, then, refers to the system of *cultural expectations* we associate with different sexes. Much of society expects people to perform distinct masculine and feminine gender roles from the moment the ultrasound technician or the gender-reveal cake tells us a child's presumed sex. Baby boys, for example, are generally considered little MVPs while baby girls are little princesses, and we see these assumptions in baby clothing, decorations for nurseries, and even how friends and family talk to and about baby boys or baby girls. As they grow older, our culture teaches boys to be stoic, adventurous, and physically strong while girls are taught to be more emotional, careful, and pretty. Whether you believe that these traits are innate (biological) or socially constructed – or a bit of both – it's easy to see how these expectations are transmitted and reinforced through various means: adults, other children, cultural traditions, television, print media, and toys, to name just a few.

In his book *Transgender 101*,³ Nicholas M. Teich calls these external performances of gender **gender expression**. Such social expectations of gender change over time, of course, but they're also rarely as monolithic as we might imagine. In our own personal experiences, we probably recognize that we don't meet all gender expectations all of the time. Not all men are physically powerful, emotionally stoic, and stalwart protectors of the more vulnerable. Similarly, not all women are emotionally open or feel a biological clock counting down the days to motherhood. (And not all people identify as men or women.) These and other expectations for men and women are created and reinforced by much of our society, but, just like our biological sex, our individual genders are more complex than our cultural system. And, of course, many of these gendered expressions and expectations are specific to social groups. For instance, in other

³ Teich, Nicholas M. *Transgender 101: A Simple Guide to a Complex Issue*. Columbia UP, 2012.

countries, men often cross their legs at the ankle or thigh in what an American might consider a feminine way. Even within this country, gender expectations can vary based on race and ethnicity, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, gender identity (whether someone is cisgender, transgender, or nonbinary, for example), and even geographic location. Because these expressions of gender differ from cultural group to cultural group, we can see the ways that they are socially constructed.

Despite the fact that much of our society expects people to perform one consistent gender, in reality, gender is much more complicated than many of our social systems reflect or allow. Rather than thinking of gender expressions in terms of either men or women, we can think of gender on a spectrum, just like we did with sex. On the gender spectrum, we can put traditionally masculine traits on one end and traditionally feminine traits on the other end. In between, are all of the various combinations of masculine and feminine traits—as well as nonbinary traits—that people use to express their gender. Women can be driven and competitive and, at the same time, nurturing; men can be both emotionally vulnerable and athletic; and, of course, people can choose to play with gender, expressing aspects of femininity one day and masculinity the next, blending gender performances on any given day, or choosing more nonbinary forms of expression.

While we all perform our gender in multiple and often shifting ways, larger social systems continue to prescribe a narrow view of gender expression. For example, a young girl who likes to play football or get dirty is often called a “tomboy,” suggesting she somehow no longer fits the category of “girl,” even though that’s her gender identity. Similarly, when young boys cry or enjoy playing with dolls, they’re often chided for being “girly” (and we might ask ourselves why this is considered such an insult, when being a “tomboy” doesn’t carry quite the same sting). The boy, too, is excluded from the socially acceptable label of “boy” until he learns to hold his feelings back and demonstrate more traditionally masculine behavior. The social pressures to conform to narrow gender expectations are powerful, as are the social pressures to reflect gender binaries rather than gender spectrums. These pressures can make it very difficult to express the many facets of ourselves, but while social expectations are powerful, that doesn’t mean that they’re not changeable. It’s important to understand them, though, in order to decide how (and if) you want to challenge them.

Activity

Practicing Analysis

We use visual images to communicate every day. Often, these visual messages are so familiar that we don't take the time to consider what other implicit ideas are part of the message. To help illustrate how everyday images communicate messages about gender, let's examine two different school crossing road signs.



Sign A: US School Crossing

1. How are the figures in Sign A gendered? What is the relationship between the two figures? What does this relationship suggest about gender? Do these gender messages compliment, contradict, or complicate American social expectations/stereotypes?



Sign B: UK School Crossing

2. How are the figures in Sign B gendered? What is the relationship between the two figures? What does this relationship suggest about gender? Do these gender messages compliment, contradict, or complicate American social expectations/stereotypes?

3. Compare/contrast the two signs. How are their designs similar? How are they different? How do they communicate similar messages? How do they communicate different messages?

4. What other signs/images do you see every day that present ideas about gender? Do their gender messages compliment, contradict, or complicate social expectations/stereotypes?

Reading Questions

Consider the questions below as you read Edward Timke and William O'Barr's "Representations of Masculinity and Femininity in Advertisements." For larger images of the advertisements, visit the website.

1. According to Timke and O'Barr, what makes recent advertisements different from those produced over ten years ago?
2. In their 2017 survey of advertisements, what are some generalizations that you could make about the gender stereotypes of men and women at different stages in their life? How do social expectations change as people mature? How do they stay the same?
3. Which ads in the article break from social expectations/traditions? How does the break from social expectation relate to the ad's intended message? Does it seem as though the advertisers use the act of challenging the social expectation as part of their advertising strategy? Why/why not?

Representations of Masculinity and Femininity in Advertisements⁴

Edward Timke and William M. O'Barr

1. Introduction

We live in a brave, new, gender-fluid world. Or at least this is what an *Adweek* article wants readers to think when it declared that advertising has entered “*Ungendered*” territory.¹ In summarizing the advertising industry’s evolving understanding of gender, *Adweek* argues that retail advertisers have become sensitive to gender identifications beyond a male-female binary. The publication claims many advertisements, especially for beauty and fashion products, are using androgynous (gender-neutral) images to appeal to many audiences and gender identifications at the same time.



Fig. 1. Article on Gender from *Adweek*²

Why is gender ambiguity such important news when studying masculinity and femininity in advertisements? When answering this question, society's and the advertising industry's changing understanding of gender is revealed. As *Adweek* emphasizes, in the new millennium, "we are in the midst of a 'tectonic shift'" in gender norms that is hard to untangle because more individuals no longer ascribe to clear identifications as male and female, and there are many varieties of masculinity and femininity.³ Summarized aptly by Ruth Bernstein, a New York-based advertiser: "As androgyny and gender fluidity become the norm rather than the exception in today's cultural landscape, brands are faced with the challenge of tackling gender norms both in their advertising and the products they offer."⁴

⁴ Originally published in *Advertising & Society Review*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2017. Project Muse, muse.jhu.edu/article/648423. Reprinted from ADText (www.adtextonline.org) which is a publication of the Advertising Educational Foundation (www.aef.com). Used with permission.



Fig. 2. The Magazines Surveyed for This Unit.⁵

This unit of *ADText* compares representations of gender in American advertisements from 2016 to advertisements from 2006. The 2006 advertisements were analyzed in a previous version of this unit. Both surveys examine ads in various magazines available at newsstands in May and June of their respective years. Although a summary of the 2006 survey is provided below, the original report (<http://muse.jhu.edu.ezproxy.library.tamu.edu/article/202979>) should be read to understand how masculinity and femininity have been treated differently and similarly since then.

So why is there now so much concern among advertisers about gender fluidity? What is so challenging about changing definitions of gender beyond the male-female binary? One immediate answer to these questions comes from deeply rooted misunderstandings about the relationship between biological sex and gender identity.

Historically, gender identification has been conceived of as the same as biological sex (i.e. one's sex organs).⁶ However, over time, especially from the 1960s to the present, the equation of sex with gender has been challenged by advances in women's rights, gay rights, and studies of gender and sexuality.⁷ Among many academic and activist circles, it has become accepted that gender is a socially constructed category that requires serious questioning. From this view, social and cultural institutions—such as family, friends, schools, religion, government, and mass media—have defined the expectations and norms that come with being male or female in a given cultural context.

Further, gender can be seen as a sort of performance that we all make and negotiate within larger cultural and societal norms.⁸ Many individuals feel like they conform easily to dominant cultural expectations of gender, which are often reinforced in advertising messages, and various forms of media. However, others feel that they do not align with society's and advertising's dominant gender expectations, so they may play along with what society expects of them, or they go their own road.

There are four terms related to sex and gender that make it possible to develop richer understandings of advertisements' messages about masculinity and femininity: gender identity, sexual orientation, biological sex, and gender expression. *Gender identity* refers to how one sees oneself on a continuum: from woman to man (or an identity in between). *Biological sex* describes one's physical sexual anatomy. *Gender expression* involves how one prefers to present one's gender: from feminine to masculine, or an expression in between (androgynous). *Sexual orientation* refers to one's sexual preferences in a partner: heterosexual (preferring someone of the opposite sex), homosexual (preferring someone of the same sex), bisexual (preferring opposite and same sex partners). A helpful summary of these terms is offered by comedian and activist Sam Killerman in his illustration of "The Genderbread Person."

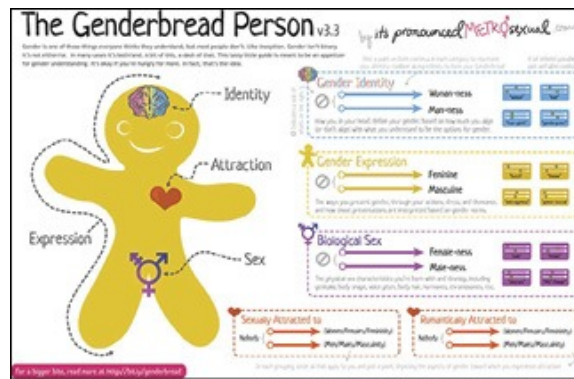


Fig. 3. A Summary of the difference among Key Words in Gender and Sexuality.⁹

Gender identity, sexual orientation, biological sex, and gender expression are helpful to untangle the virtually infinite complexities of gender and sexual identities. More importantly, these terms help us analyze how advertisers' messages involve certain meanings and definitions of gender and sexuality that may be overly simplistic, or perhaps progressive and cutting edge. Some advertisements may espouse strict gender binaries, while others may play with gender boundaries which have shifted in recent times.

For this new survey of representations of gender in advertisements, it should be kept in mind that gender is now conceived to go beyond two categories of identity. That is, gender is a multiplicity of identities relative to individuals. As such, age-old gender expectations are being challenged and questioned, which makes it challenging for some, especially those working in advertising, to represent that complexity of our cultural and social lives. How can advertisers successfully appeal to a variety of gender identities, when they may only have one moment to leave an impression on millions of viewers through a thirty-second television spot, a fifteen-second YouTube ad, a one-second Facebook banner ad, a billboard next to a busy highway, or a fashion spread in a magazine? Simplicity and speed are of the essence in our saturated media environment, so how can complex gender identities be treated with such little audience attention span?

To be sure, gender fluidity and the complexities that come with it are especially challenging for advertisers who regularly strive to create certainty in selling products and ideas for their clients.

If there is so much diversity in gender identifications, how can advertisements' mass-mediated messages effectively resonate with large groups of individuals? Do advertisements solidify certain historically accepted gender norms? Alternatively, do advertisements reflect or fuel changes in gender norms? How have advertisements challenged dominant, binary notions of masculinity and femininity?

As was noted in the 2006 survey, advertising tells important stories about masculinity and femininity and the roles that men and women and boys and girls should play and aspire to at different points in their lives. Gender roles are culturally determined in any particular moment, but this does not mean that what appears at one time does not have relevance or resonance at another point in time. For example, advertisements showing the ideal housewife/mother from the 1940s may express similar ideals as representations of women found in advertisements today, such as the need to take care of the home, and to teach their daughters how to be masters of a clean home, too. In other words, advertisements' representations of masculinity and femininity can reinforce and legitimate certain gender roles and hierarchies between men and women.



Fig. 4. Housewife/Mother Ideal, c. 1946.¹⁰



Fig. 5. Reinforcement of Housewife/Mother Ideal, c. 2011.¹¹

Advertisements' representations, thus, idealize and model certain roles and behaviors for men and women while ignoring others. What is emphasized in one moment may change or be solidified in the cultural registry. As such, studying changes in advertisements' representations of gender allow us to see how advertisements may serve as a site of resistance to, or acceptance of, changing views on social and cultural categories like gender.

Therefore, in this unit, by paying close attention to what has changed (and, most importantly, what has not changed) from 2006 to 2016, advertisements' dual treatment of gender is revealed: advertisements' representations can solidify and reinforce historic gender norms; they can also shift and adapt society's understandings and expectations of gender. In the end, advertisements do not merely serve the function of selling products. Rather, their representations can be a site of struggle to hold on to, or let go of, old ways of conceiving of masculinity and femininity.

2. Representations of Masculinity and Femininity in Advertisements from 2006

In the 2006 *ADText* unit, out of over 1,000 advertisements found in newsstand magazines from May to June 2006, eighty-seven ads were analyzed to uncover how masculinity and femininity emphasized certain gender roles and expectations throughout the human life cycle.

Across many of the ads, boys and men were placed in elevated positions of masculine power and strength compared to girls and women, who were often depicted as passive, submissive participants dependent on, or seeking the approval of, men. It is men who drive the action of a particular scene—such as a dinner night out—or are the center of attention—such as a father holding his baby on his shoulders, while an adoring wife looks on, during a walk outside.

One distinct role for women seen in 2006's ads, especially for women depicted in their early adult years, was to be objects of desire for men's viewing or prospective sexual pleasure.

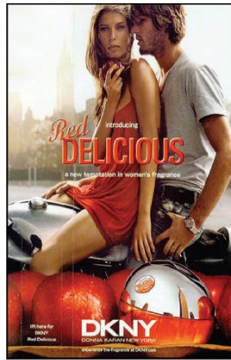


Fig. 8. Women as Objects of Desire.¹⁴

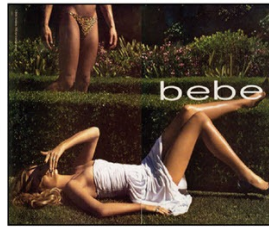


Fig. 9. Woman as Submissive Sex Object.¹⁵



Fig. 10. The Ad's Image and Copy Reinforce the Male Gaze.¹⁶

When women were not something to gaze upon, they often were depicted in the roles of nurturers of children, keepers of order within the home, or cooperative brokers, usually among other girls and women.

In other words, in the sampling from 2006, girls and women were treated with *ritualizations of subordination*.¹⁷ In these rituals, or common practices of representing men and women, advertisements project and reinforce gender hierarchies between men and women through various strategies: making men appear larger than women, putting men at the center of women's attention, having men stand in more secure positions, using women with large, goofy smiles, and showcasing men actively accomplishing goals, while women were often shown as immobile or passive individuals in a scene. All of these rituals elevate men's status above women.

Similarly, throughout the life cycle, advertisements' representations in 2006 tended to prioritize and emphasize boys' and men's vigor and accomplishments, while girls and women were often reduced to their more submissive or passive roles—often in interior locations. Even when girls

and women were featured in strong positions beyond a caregiver role, such as athletes or businesswomen, their assertiveness was often undermined by their heightened femininity, as seen in their wearing prominent make-up, well-painted fingernails, fashionable clothing, and perfectly coiffed hair.



Fig. 11. Masking Athletic Strength by Focusing on Hair.¹⁸



Fig. 12. Empowered Businesswoman.¹⁹

In addition to elevating the status of masculinity over femininity, the 2006 advertisements' representations of parenthood reinforced the importance for both men and women of reproducing clear male-female gender role distinctions in future generations. The term *social tableaux*—the way in which advertisements depict relationships among people to reinforce certain societal structures—reminds us that advertisements present expected gender roles in society.²⁰ When looking across the 2006 advertisements, one can see representations showcasing fathers teaching their sons traditionally masculine life lessons, such fishing or doing more interesting things than homework.

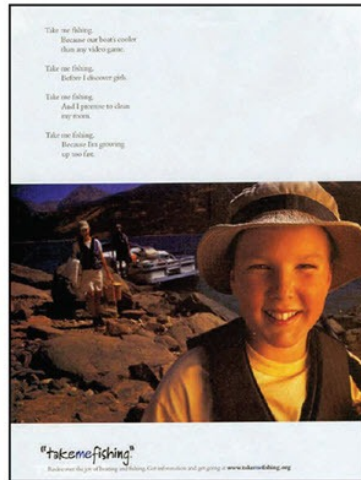


Fig. 13. Father's Fishing Lesson.²¹

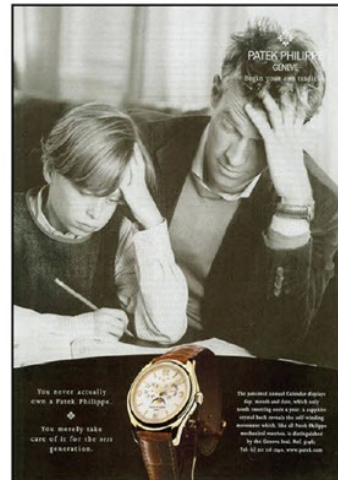


Fig. 14. Father's Lesson: Satisfaction Beyond Schoolwork.²²

Similarly, there are representations that emphasize women's roles as nurturing mothers and caregivers, showcased by representations of a mother teaching her daughter how to be kind and caring through nurturing acts.



Fig. 15. This Woman Nurtures her Daughter Like a Madonna.²³



Fig. 16. Mother as Nurturing Example.²⁴

Representations that show fathers giving sons masculine life lessons and mothers giving daughters feminine life lessons function on two significant levels. First, such ads reinforce divided gender roles and expectations along male-female lines, which segregates fathers/sons and mothers/daughters into separate spheres. Second, and more significantly, such messages legitimate ad viewers' reenactment of separate gender roles in their everyday lives. In other words, ads with gendered life lessons show how fathers and mothers can teach their sons and daughters, respectively, to take on their traditional male and female roles. Such messages, by implication, state that the blurring of gender lines is confusing and troublesome.

Across both men and women, older individuals in the later stages of life were excluded from main newsstand magazines in 2006. If such older men and women were featured, it was often for medications to heal such individuals' ailments. Men more than women were still shown as active, accomplished, and in control of their lives; older women were relegated to taking care of grandchildren, resting in an interior setting, or being taken care of by her stronger male companion.

Keeping this summary of the 2006 advertisements in mind, along with the *Adweek* article mentioned previously, an important question emerges: Have ads continued to reinforce gender divisions and a distinct separation of masculinity from femininity? To answer this question, over four dozen ads are analyzed below, from out of over 1,000 ads appearing in major newsstand magazines in May and June 2016.

From this comparison, one will learn that not much has changed in girls' and women's subordination. However, there are some notable adjustments in the relaxing of some masculine ideals (perhaps pushing toward more feminine ideals for men), especially for men of the Millennial generation born between roughly 1982 and 2002. Gender's treatment in advertisements has become slightly more fluid for younger so-called metrosexual men, but much has remained the same in ten years' time.

3. Advertisements Ten Years Later: Some Changes, But Not So Many

In comparing advertisements from 2006 to 2016, there are some changes, but not as many as *Adweek's* "*Ungendered*" piece would lead one to believe. Although some gender fluidity is seen in many advertisements depicting Millennial metrosexuals, girls and women still are seen enacting rituals of subordination. Hierarchies along gendered lines still persist, leading one to question how far changes have come for breaking from longstanding gender divisions.

In representing the early years of a child's life, advertisements continue to showcase distinct roles for girls and boys, which is stressed through gender-stereotyped coloring, such as pink for girls and blue for boys. The division between boys and girls through this color scheme reveals more than a simple way to classify and identify girls and boys. Rather, the colors blue and pink provide stability in knowing the sex of a baby. Even before a baby is born, a common question is asked: "Boy or girl?" This question signifies the importance of clearly identifying a newborn's gender, which leads to the reinforcement of specific expectations for the baby based on his/her being a boy or a girl. Ambiguity in gender can be seen as potentially worrisome.

The following ad for a baby gender prediction kit showcases the desire to know and maintain firm gender boundaries for babies. This ad confuses the difference between biological sex and gender. The name of the product, "IntelliGender," implies that parents are smart if they know their baby's exact gender. What is significant to note about this product is that a medical test is being used to determine gender. However, as it has been made clear earlier, gender is an act of culturally-bound self-expression.



Fig. 17. Ad Revealing Need for Stability through Gender Distinction²⁵

The IntelliGender ad also provides a glimpse into societal concerns about knowing a clear gender status of babies. On a basic level, knowing a baby's biological sex reassures parents of what to buy for the baby—perhaps it will dictate what types of clothes to buy, what color to paint a bedroom wall, and what kinds of toys to purchase. On a deeper level, knowing the baby's sex helps parents imagine the expectations for the baby, based on culturally and socially subscribed gender roles. In other words, knowing if the baby is either a boy or a girl helps simplify expectations, based on the longstanding divide between males and females.

The product's assertion that there are only two genders, and the need to label people as either male or female, is strengthened through the ad's colors. The use of pink for the word "girl" is distinguished from the word "boy" in blue. The black word "or" in "Girl or Boy?" serves to emphasize that distinction. To solidify the importance of gender differences, the father wears a blue shirt while he holds pink baby booties close to the mother. Overall, this advertisement reveals a world where biological sex is expected to match up with gender identity. The colors blue and pink maintain society's gender binary. The product provides security, relief, and a sense of stability to parents not accepting of gender fluidity.

Even for seemingly gender-neutral products such as a soothing gel for teething babies, or a calming baby formula, blue is coded for boys and pink is coded for girls to create clear gender divisions. Embedded in these representations is the expectation for mothers to care for and tend to their sick children as caregivers. Although there is a father depicted in the Gerber ad, the dominant images for adults soothing the baby girl are women, reinforcing women as central caretakers in a baby's life.



Fig. 18. Blue Signifying Baby Boy.²⁶



Fig. 19. Pink Signifying Baby Girl, Women as Central Caregivers.²⁷

Although many ads of babies tend to follow the pink and blue convention to distinguish boys from girls, some break the mold by using other colors. In the following Desitin ad, although the baby is designated as a girl through the repeated use of the word “her,” the purple and gray shirt creates some gender ambiguity. In the American context, dark purple and gray may not immediately signify a boy or a girl—such colors could be worn by a boy or a girl. Further, this gendered dissonance is reinforced through the boombox image appearing on the shirt and the color blue dominating the bottom of the advertisement, both of which could be associated with boys. Beyond gender neutrality, the color purple often has lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or queer (LGBTQ) connotations, as seen in supposedly gay coded children’s characters like the purple Teletubby named Tinky Winky, various LGBTQ organization logos, and Alice Walker’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Color Purple*, which features a lesbian romance.²⁸ By using a color like purple that is neutral or aligned with LGBTQ identities, advertisers deftly depict babies living in a more gender and sexually flexible society.



Fig. 20. Purple as a Gender "Neutral" Color.²⁹

Ads may also use other gender-neutral colors, such as yellow, orange, and green, to break down the pink-blue dichotomy. In such cases, viewers have flexibility in ascribing the gender they see fit depending on their cultural perspective. Advertisements' increasing play with ambiguous color codes showcases possible appeals to audiences who regard traditional binary gender roles as restrictive and outdated.

In 2006, many ads paired mothers with their children to underscore women's roles as caretakers for the family. This trend is visible in this new survey of ads, but fathers were increasingly featured in child-rearing and home care roles. A Barilla ad shows how a father can have fun guiding his child on the proper way to eat angel hair pasta. In a Zillow ad, the father is in control of a large children's party. For TD Ameritrade, a father is in command of his child's fun. Across all of the ads, though, fathers are the drivers of action and the center of attention. They are goofy providers of fun and laughter who might make a mess and never clean it up. Such a role contrasts sharply to a mother's serious job of consoling others, cleaning up, or teaching children, usually daughters, lessons on how to keep a beautiful home, as seen earlier in the Mr. Clean ad. Further, even when fathers are depicted in a caretaking role, their strength in other, more traditionally masculine aspects of life are emphasized. In TD Ameritrade's ad, the father can attend to the house and bring fun to his child. However, as the copy reads, a man's mastery over his money (and thereby his family's financial security) is more important than watching over children and a home's cleanliness: "Get your financial house in order. Your actual house can wait."



Fig. 21. Father Having Fun Showing His Child How to Eat Pasta.³⁰



Fig. 22. Goofy Father as Center of Fun and Attention among Children.³¹

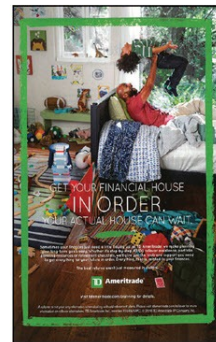


Fig. 23. More Fathers Are Represented in the Home, but Their Strength Still Comes from More Masculine Concerns like Money.³²

As seen in the ads from 2006, societal and cultural expectations for girls and boys are reinforced when children reach their adolescent years. The color coding of blue and pink is still often used to distinguish boys from girls, but what is most notable is how boys and girls are separated by what they can and should do. Boys are still often depicted as active and outdoors. They are masters of their destiny and go out into the world exploring and taking risks outside on the playground or playing field.



Fig. 24. The World is a Boy's Castle.³³

Girls, on the other hand, are not as active. Girls are regularly featured indoors, cleaning, playing dress-up, cooking, or doing less active hobbies such as reading. From the formative years of a child's life, then, advertisements represent clear expectations for boys and girls. Boys are told to go out and achieve success outside the home. Conversely, girls are supposed to find their happiness through how they look and what they can achieve in the comforts of home.



Fig. 25. Boy's Destiny is to Explore.³⁴

Even in instances when boys and girls are featured together outside, boys often take the lead or are the center of attention, revealing the expectation for boys to excel and be the drivers of action and success.

In play spaces, divisions between boys and girls also appear subtly. In a gymnasium scene advertising Lunchables, boys are shown in the most noticeably daring positions—climbing a rope, hanging from a basketball hoop, or pole vaulting across the room. There are girls featured in daring positions, too, but most are tenuous and apprehensive, such as the girl hanging over an exercise ball seeking a boy's help, and a girl teetering on a tower of equipment. The strength of the girls' pyramid formation is hidden compared to the boy in the foreground using all of his might to win a game of tug-of-war. From this scene, then, boys are positioned in more prominent positions of strength than their girl peers, solidifying the view of boys as actors in society with girls being apprehensively active. As summarized in a scene with a boy and girl

eyeing up a fish tank, girls look on as boys take the adventurous risk of going on “a quest in the deep, blue sea.”



Fig. 26. Girl as a Master of Interior Play.³⁵



Fig. 27. Girl's Dress-Up.³⁶

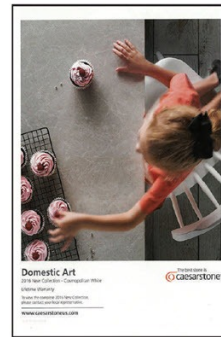


Fig. 28. Domestic Art.³⁷

The gender divisions for children in magazine advertisements do not insinuate that there are no challenges to stereotyped images of girls as passive and inactive. In fact, there have been campaigns beyond magazine pages that seek to embolden girls and shift expectations of what it means to be a modern girl. One such effort is Always' 2014 and 2015 Super Bowl campaign featuring several online videos showcasing stereotyped views of girls, along with messages seeking to quash such visions of girls as unathletic, passive, and docile.



Fig. 29. Girl's Comfort Inside.³⁸



Fig. 30. Boy as Leader Before Girls.³⁹



Fig. 31. Boy as Center of Attention.⁴⁰

As found in 2006, when girls transition to teenagers and young adults, the ads in this new survey push beyond the seemingly innocuous dichotomy of girls wearing pink tutus and boys playing with toy trucks in blue dungarees. In many advertisements, as girls turn to young women, they are reduced to how they stack up to various standards of beauty and sexuality. Ad messages seek to convince audiences that adhering to such ideals is desirable and necessary for young women compared to other priorities and accomplishments.



Fig. 32. Boys as Risk-Takers Worth Noticing.⁴¹



Fig. 33. Active, Adventurous Boy, Watching Girl.⁴²

Young adult men are featured for their physical attractiveness, too. However, they are often depicted in positions of strength, control, and accomplishment, as seen through their physicality or savviness in work. Further, when depicted with women, men form the center of attention or are the largest people in an image, thereby enhancing the relative size and therefore prestige of men.



Fig. 34. Woman as Beauty Ideal Who Waits to Be Admired by Viewers.⁴⁵



Fig. 35. Celebrity Woman as Ideal Beauty Who Is also Sexually Available.⁴⁶



Fig. 36. A Sleight of Hand Can Draw Attention to Women's Sexual Availability.⁴⁷

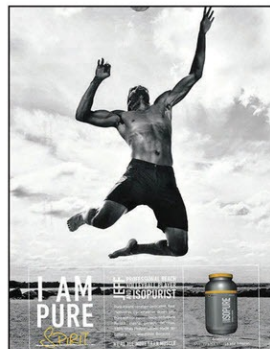


Fig. 37. Male Physical Ideal.⁴⁸



Fig. 38. Achieving the Male Physical Ideal.⁴⁹



Fig. 39. Man on Top of the World.⁵⁰



Fig. 40. An Example of a Man's Larger Relative Size Compared to Women.⁵¹

Even ten years later, advertisements' messages about and to women still contradict larger societal messages of feminism and gender equality.⁵² On the one hand, girls and women are told they can have it all today: a good education, a successful job, and a loving relationship and family. These positive messages for girls and women to achieve their goals are reinforced in many ads, such as one ad for allergy relief, where a successful girls' soccer team makes the most of its opportunity to succeed. Similarly, in an ad for Travel to Colorado, a woman in a canoe makes the most of the world that is hers to explore. As the copy reads, "Our future has yet to be written." On one level, the message speaks to the uncharted wilderness of Colorado. However, on a more symbolic level, the ad's text speaks to today's women who are at the precipice of writing their own story of success.

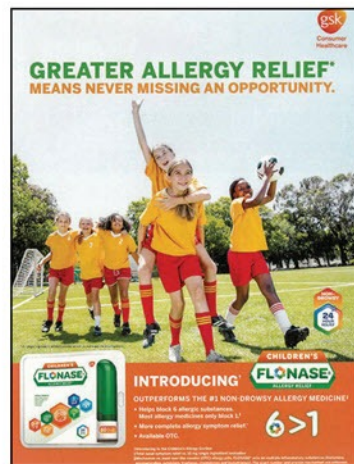


Fig. 41. Message for Girls to Seize Opportunities.⁵³

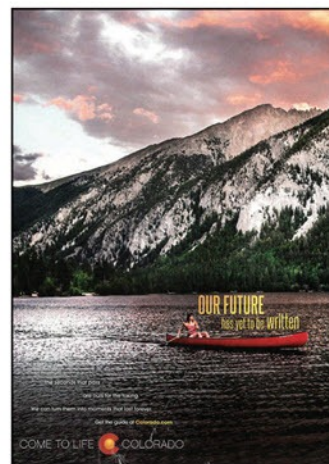


Fig. 42. Our Future Has Yet to be Written.⁵⁴

On the other hand, many advertisements equate women's power with their beauty and sexuality, which may undermine messages of gender equality. Women and girls are told that they can be successful through the purchase of beauty products or reenactment of the feminine beauty standards embedded in advertisements' messages. With such logic, women's liberation comes through her consuming power and not her intellect or work achievements.



Fig. 43. Succeed by Following the Beauty Formula⁵⁵

One common way that advertisements try to help women achieve success through beauty products is through recipe, ingredient, or instruction pieces, such as that featured in Covergirl's advertisement for clear looking skin. The message to girls and women is that they, too, like teen celebrity Becky G., can achieve the "flawless" skin so desired—and expected—for respectable, successful, and noteworthy women. Even more explicit is Murad's moisturizer ad, which tells women that they can achieve success—a "brighter outlook" and a "beautiful life"—by having bright skin.



Fig. 44. Brighter Future through Following Beauty Expectations⁵⁶

Sometimes, ads that seem uplifting for girls and women are subtly counter to such messages. In a Colgate ad encouraging women to "Smile with Strength," a woman bites down on athletic tape. The word "strength" appears to insinuate that this woman featured in athletic wear is strong, but any notion of strength is challenged by the woman's wearing a bra-like top, and the message of the ad that women should somehow always be smiling and pleasant. Further, as the

concept of the *ritualization of subordination* reminds us, any power that could come from this athletic woman is absorbed by her use of a clownish smile.⁵⁷



Fig. 45. Seemingly Empowering Message for Girls: Be Strong, But Be Sure to Smile.⁵⁸



Fig. 46. Seemingly Empowering Message for Girls: Shoes Create Self Worth.⁵⁹

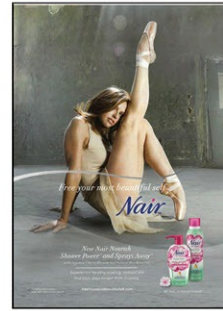


Fig. 47. Conflicting Messages to Girls: Achieve, but You Must Be Beautiful.⁶⁰

In another advertisement, for DSW, women are told to “derive satisfaction within,” which insinuates building up one’s innate sense of self. However, closer inspection of the secondary title, it becomes clearer that a woman’s worth and her ability to achieve come through the shoes she buys: “Where will your shoes take you?”

In another ad, for Nair, the explicit message to girls and women is that they can “Free your most beautiful self” through hair-removal cream. However, the ad links women’s freedom with beauty and her necessity to maintain “healthy-looking, radiant skin.” Further, the use of the ballet dancer’s canted head and extended slender legs insinuates that for full enjoyment of freedom, women must adhere to being docile and available. Thus, women’s value comes through their maintenance of their beauty regimen that makes them more attractive and available to others.

Since 2006, there has been a noticeable rise in what has popularly been called the “metrosexual.” This “new man” is a young, urban, and heterosexual male who, ignoring previous, more “macho” ideals for men, is concerned about how his hair looks, what clothes he wears, and how nicely he is groomed.⁶¹ Not afraid of being criticized for caring about fashion, his appearance, and his level of taste—once deemed “effeminate” concerns—the metrosexual finds strength and pride in being attractive to others. Like instructional ads for women, magazine ads encourage metrosexuals’ fascinations with achieving the perfectly shaven face or the well-placed untucked shirt.

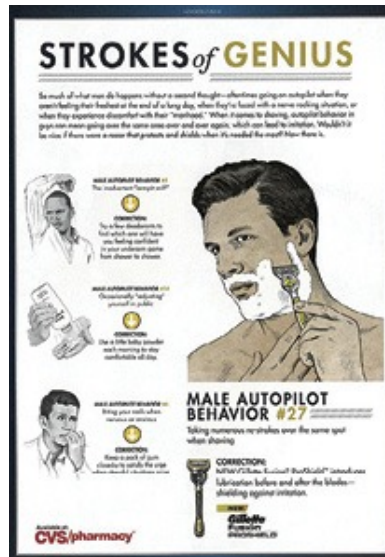


Fig. 48. Metrosexual Grooming Recipe for Success.⁶²

Compared to the hyper-sexualized and beautified woman, though, the metrosexual is enabled with the strident confidence that comes through his good looks. This new version of masculinity finds value not only in being well put together, but such men's attention to self-image provides a source of strength and sensitive virility. Consequently, metrosexuals gain status through their attention to their bodies and looks. Women may obtain status and attention through looking good, but it is fleeting—when women's value is in the continued service of others' pleasure, women's power is diluted.



Fig. 49. The Metrosexual's Perfect Untucked Shirt.⁶³

On a continuum of gender identity—with male and female making up extreme poles—the metrosexual, therefore, represents an expansion of what defines traditional masculinity. Rather than masculinity being defined by longstanding images of a man of brute strength and stamina, performing feats through physicality, having rugged and taxing hobbies outdoors, or a successful

businessman in professional attire, acceptable notions of masculinity have shifted closer to more traditionally feminine concerns of sharp clothes and a well-groomed body.



Fig. 50. Masculine Power through Physical Prowess.⁶⁴

The acceptable masculine ideal for men now includes the need to be more concerned about one's looks and desirability compared to earlier times. This reveals more flexibility afforded to men to express their gender identity. This does not mean that metrosexual masculinities are not challenged among men. Other, more traditional notions of rugged masculinity, such as those found in images of men in the country or woods doing hard work outside, may have an elevated status as being "genuinely" masculine. In other words, there are now more refined and varied notions of masculinity, and there are debates on what is deemed more masculine or manly. In the end, though, men in advertisements are more enabled than they are for women. Women still must adhere to ideal standards of beauty and sexuality that reinforce submissiveness. Men, as seen through the metrosexual, are not submissive objects of desire; they are emboldened and successful through their keeping up with the fashionable times.



Fig. 51. Rugged Outdoor Man.⁶⁵

This is not to say that unrealistic standards of beauty and sexuality for women are not criticized. One well-known critique is Dove's 2009 "Evolution" campaign, highlighting the use of digital altering techniques to create unrealistic expectations of beauty and body shape for women. Additionally, critics such as Jean Kilbourne continue to show how objectification of women in

advertisements undermines women's abilities to imagine themselves as anything other than as objects of desire and beauty, or as submissive nurturers.⁶⁸



Fig. 52. Professional Man.⁶⁶

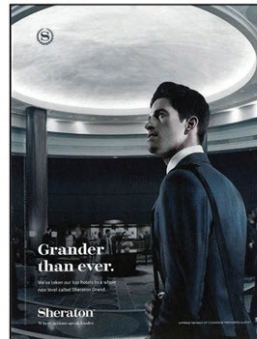


Fig. 53. Successfully Suited Man.⁶⁷

As seen in the earlier survey of ads, men and women in the later stages of life (beyond the “ideal” target demographic of 18–35 year olds) are still often relegated to the periphery in advertising. Today, because of the aging population of Baby Boomers, America has the largest number of older individuals in its history.⁷⁰ Despite their significant number, older men and women are still not as visible as their younger counterparts in many newsstand magazine advertisements.



Fig. 54. Older Woman at Home with Cat.⁷¹



Fig. 55. Older Woman Facing an Ailment with Resilience.⁷²



Fig. 56. Racing for All Ages.⁷³



Fig. 57. Bike Warrior.⁷⁴



Fig. 58. Older Active Women.⁷⁵

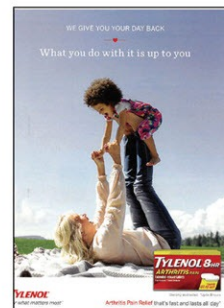


Fig. 59. An Active, More Fun Grandmother with the Help of Arthritis Medication.⁷⁶

However, the new survey presents some changes in how older men and women are represented in advertisements. Given longer lifespans and the aging Boomer population's active lifestyle, older men and women are depicted in more lively situations. Older women and men are still regularly featured in some ads within interior spaces or facing ailments, but many are now shown in more active situations: running races, partaking in a serious bike ride, and doing yoga. Additionally, older women remain associated with watching their grandchildren, but they are more energetic and fun with the enabling enhancements of medication, as Tylenol demonstrates.

Older people are still not sexualized like their younger counterparts, but this does not mean that older people's sexuality is not a target of discussion, as seen in advertisements for sex-enhancing drugs such as Viagra, or even sex-enhancing devices for older women, such as Estring. Because of older individuals' relative absence in advertisements, and older men and women having their sexuality and physical beauty striped away, one can see that society prioritizes young adult life as the peak moment of ideal femininity and masculinity.



Fig. 60. Older but Not Sexually Dead.⁷⁷

As noted earlier with the stereotyped images of girls and women, the idealization of youth has also been questioned. One prime example is the “Disrupt Aging” 2016 campaign from AARP, the American Association of Retired Persons. The goal of this campaign was to “celebrate all those who own their age,” and to “feature new ways of living and aging.”⁷⁸ In one of the campaign's most prominent spots, AARP seems to follow Always' lead by showcasing and disrupting stereotypes. In this case, young Millennials are paired up with older individuals to do various physical activities like yoga, dancing, and push-ups; the older folks end up outdoing their younger counterparts, which encourages viewers and the Millennials in the commercial to question their preconceived notions of what it means to be an “old” man or woman. Advertisements like the AARP spot show increasing efforts by brands and other organizations to question dominant definitions of masculinity and femininity and the other identifications that

intersect with gender identity: ability, age, ethnicity, race, religion, socioeconomic status, among other identities.

Representations of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals in advertising are more prevalent in the new survey, but most representations from the sampled magazines do not deviate much from major 2006 trends. There are no representations of LGBTQ children. Although there is a diversity of ethnicities and races present, couples are often kept within their ethnic and racial group. Further, when couples are present, gay men and women tend to take on heterosexual roles—with one partner taking on a more dominant “male” role and another taking on a more passive “feminine” role. Gays and lesbians from higher socioeconomic situations are still dominantly represented, too. In other words, advertisements tend to present an idealized vision of gays and lesbians as able-bodied, fit, well-groomed, wealthy, and in heteronormative relationships.



Fig. 61. Well-off Gay Couple within Same Racial Group.⁸⁰

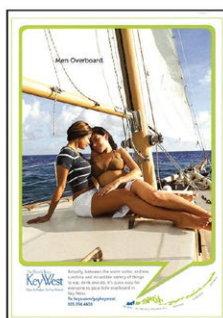


Fig. 62. Well-off Lesbian Couple within Same Racial Group.⁸¹



Fig. 63. Reenactment of Heteronormative Roles; Insinuation of Gay Men's Promiscuity.⁸²



Fig. 64. Reenactment of Heteronormative Roles.⁸³



Fig. 65. Able-bodied Gay Ideal.⁸⁴

4. A Gender-Fluid Future?

At this unit's start, it was noted that there may be more gender fluidity today than ever before. The longstanding gender binary of male-female has been challenged on many fronts. In the ten

years since the original analysis of magazine ads, there have been changing policies recognizing LGBTQ individuals' rights in society (i.e. gay marriage), media have increased their representations of transgendered individuals, and famous individuals such as Caitlyn Jenner have come out to share their stories of being transgendered. *National Geographic* even dedicated an issue to exploring the different expressions of gender around the world.



Fig. 66. Transparent: Amazon's Show about a Transgender "Coming Out." ⁹⁰

Today, one's gender identity does not have to coincide with one's biological sex. Rather, gender identity may fall along a virtually infinite continuum of gender identifications and expressions. However, there are many people who resist such gender fluid thinking. As such, there is still an unsettled question about whether the diversity of gendered identities can and will be represented in advertisements as society comes to understand and slowly accept more fluid conceptions of gender.



Fig. 67. Caitlyn Jenner (formerly Bruce Jenner, a Celebrity and Olympic Gold Medalist) on Vanity Fair cover.⁹¹

Advertisers, as noted earlier in *Adweek's* "Ungendered" piece, are sensitive to changes in how masculinity and femininity are culturally conceived. Yet, as found through this unit's comparison of advertisements between 2006 and 2016, advertisements' representations of masculinity and femininity excel in maintaining specific gender roles that have been standard for some time.



Fig. 68. National Geographic's Issue on Gender Identities Around the World.⁹²

In the future, will advertisements' treatments of gender become more malleable as individuals in society come to slowly understand and accept gender fluidity? Or, will advertisements continue to reinforce more rigid notions of gender expression and identity? The answers to these questions will unfold with time, but we can be certain that advertisements' representations of gender are not a static or benign force. Advertisements' representations of masculinity and femininity may hold on to certain historically accepted ideals while breaking and reshaping others. The process is slow with some radical shifts along the way. As citizens and consumers, it is our job to decipher and question advertisements' ideals of masculinity and femininity and the expectations they place on us and future generations.

Please see the website for additional video examples, author biographies, and footnotes.

Selecting a Visual for Your Visual Analysis

Now that you've learned more about social expectations of gender and have practiced your analysis skills, you will need to select a visual image that challenges or complicates the social expectations of gender; therefore, you need a visual that 1) communicates ideas about gender, and 2) communicates gender ideas that are more complex than our society generally expects. To evaluate if a visual meets the needs of the assignment and to being analyzed regarding the gender messages in the visual, consider the following questions:

1. What is the central, intended message of the visual? What is it trying to say to the viewer? What's the visual's purpose? (For example: to sell, to advocate, to inform, to shock, to motivate, to protest, etc.)
2. What people or groups are represented and how? (Note: it will likely be difficult to analyze gender in a visual that does not include people.) What might those people think of the way they're being represented?

3. What is the tone of the visual? Is it critical? Sympathetic? Ironic? Something else? What cultural factors might influence this tone? Does the visual's tone influence the message about gender?
4. What is the overall gender message of the visual—that is, what is it telling us about what it means to be masculine and/or feminine in our society? Does the message support or complicate the general stereotypes that Timke and O'Barr detail in their article? (Note: remember that for this assignment, your visual needs to challenge or complicate the social expectations/stereotypes in some way.)

If the answers to these questions are clear and you can see that this visual is challenging the gender system in some way, the visual should be appropriate for the assignment. You can use the questions in the Visual Message Analysis Guide to analyze the visual in greater depth.

When students first wrote different versions of this assignment, they usually focused on print advertisements from monthly magazines that they subscribed to or could easily access. The world of advertising and social representation has changed rapidly, though, and you may find yourself in the same position as corporate, governmental, or other institutional marketers who are hoping to represent their companies or organizations in ethical and diverse ways. If you go to Koch Industries, to name one controversial example, you will see how this Wichita-based company is shaping its image for twenty-first century American audiences. On its “Life at Koch” page, which was designed to attract interns and future employees, the webpage designers have included 11 photographs that depict the wide range of diversity – in terms of age, gender, race, and ethnicity – that reflect their ideal employee community. Although critics may be uncomfortable by how this webpage markets Koch Industries’ commitment to the environment and to diversity, it is obvious that Koch has been careful to craft its public image.⁵

Other examples about how corporations, charitable organizations, and politicians use images in interesting ways are the following:

- The CEO and founder of Quilt, Ashley Sumner, was depicted in a widely distributed meme in which she was arguing that she should no longer have to qualify her corporate title with “female” as an adjective.⁶

⁵ “Life at Koch.” Koch. <https://jobs.kochcareers.com/pages/culture>.

⁶ Rosman, Katherin. “She Wants to Kill the Girl Boss.” *New York Times*, 24 March 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/24/style/linked-in-ashley-sumner-female-bosses.html>.



- Deb Haaland, the first indigenous person to lead a cabinet-level government agency in the United States, was photographed in “traditional indigenous dress” during her swearing-in ceremony as Secretary of Interior. Haaland’s clothing choices were intentional, and she stated the following: “Wearing it in this day and age is an act of self empowerment and reclamation of who we are and that gives us the opportunity to proudly make bold statements in front of others who sometimes refuse to see us. It allows us to be our authentic selves unapologetically.”⁷ Below, you will find a campaign poster for Deb Haaland, which includes her “Be Fierce” message.



Given these two examples, as you search for a visual to analyze, consider other possibilities beyond print and Internet advertisements. Here are some ideas to consider:

- Movie posters, book covers, album art, and video game advertising
- Images from company, governmental, or organizational brochures or websites, which may give you some insight into how these organizations want to represent themselves and foster an image of inclusiveness and diversity (Note: University websites are a rich source for these images.)
- Textbook images and educational materials for young people, such as PowerPoint slides

⁷ Friedman, Vanessa. “Deb Haaland Makes History, and Dresses for It.” *New York Times*, 19 March 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/19/style/deb-haaland-history-native-dress.html>.

- Brochures and other promotional materials for doctors' offices, health-related institutions, and volunteer organizations, among other possibilities.

Visual Message Analysis Guide

Consider the points below about target audience and design features to analyze your visual message. By answering these questions, you actually begin the drafting process: you're identifying evidence from the visual that can later be used as support in your memo. Analyzing how the visual message works is the first step in working toward your Visual Analysis memo.

Note: Remember that you will be analyzing **how this visual challenges or complicates traditional gender expectations**.

Target Audience

Understanding the target audience of a visual message is critical to our understanding of how the message works. That's why we begin with identifying, as closely as possible, the target audience: with whom were the visual's creators trying to communicate and why? To answer these questions, consider the points below:

- Where does the visual appear? Was it in a magazine, on a poster or banner, online, on Facebook or accompanying an article, or the label or cover on a product, etc.?
- Who is the intended audience (who is likely to be browsing Facebook, or reading *Sports Illustrated*)? Is it men, women, teenagers, parents, retirees? Think here also about demographics such as gender, age, region, class, and ethnicity. What specific details of the visual help you to know who the audience is?
- How does the visual appeal to its audience? Why would the audience be drawn to this visual?
- What tone or feeling does the visual project? How does that tone relate to the audience?

Design Features

All visual messages have to use elements of design to communicate with their audiences. Therefore, to analyze the message, you have to closely study the different features to figure out what they contribute to the overall message. Answer the questions listed below for the design features of layout, people, context, color, and text and images.

Layout

Layout is the overall arrangement of elements and the general use of space in the visual. Placement and size of the features within a visual in relationship to other features can imply meaning about those features. Consider:

- What do you notice first? What seems to be the most important feature?
- Consider the arrangement of the visual's elements. Which elements are larger or more dominant? Which elements are smaller or less dominant?
- Is the visual divided into sections? How are the elements arranged within the sections?
- How are elements in the visual framed? Does the visual use empty space? Does the visual use shapes and lines?
- How does the placement of text influence what the audience reads first? What might be meant by emphasizing that information?
- How does the placement of the text relate to the placement of the images? What meaning could be implied by placing the text and images together in this manner?

People

To analyze a message about gender, you've likely chosen a visual that contains images of people. Studying how people are presented in the visual is vital to understanding the message about gender. Consider:

- What kinds of people are in the visual? Describe their age, gender, race, ethnicity, size, able-bodied status, and perceived class.
- How are the people portrayed? Describe their clothing, hair styles, body posture, including which portions of their bodies are shown, their facial expressions, hand gestures, etc.
- What kind of camera angle does the visual use? Are the people in focus, shot from above, shot from below, close up or far away? A low camera angle (where we're looking up at the subject) suggests that the subject, or feature in the shot, is powerful or high-ranking; a high camera angle suggests that the subject is inferior or low-ranking.

- Does there seem to be a relationship between the people in the visual? Are the people arranged in a way that projects a feeling, such as dominance, superiority, love, or friendship?
- What are the people in the visual looking at? Are they looking at something in the visual or something outside? Are they looking at you, the reader? Are their eyes closed? Can you even see their eyes or faces? What someone looks at and how someone looks at it can create meaning. If the visual does not show someone's eyes, it can suggest deception or mystery. If you can't see someone's face, it can suggest a lack of identity, or even objectification, which is a lack of humanity.

Context

Context includes the created environment, or set, within the visual. Some visuals may tell a story while others may be a snapshot moment in time. Knowing the context can help you find meaning about the visual message. Consider:

- Where does the visual appear to be set? Consider the time of day, the year or decade, the place (inside, outside, rural, urban, etc.), and the season.
- What kind of story is the visual telling? Can you imagine what might have taken place before or after the picture shown?
- What props are in the visual? Are they new, old, clean, dirty, neat, or disordered? What do these items and their condition suggest?
- What social meaning do we associate with these props? A sports car, for example, means something different than an SUV. What cultural impressions are created by the visual's props?
- What kinds of people might relate to the story being told? What kinds of people might feel left out?

Color

Color is an important design feature that can catch the audience's attention while simultaneously conveying meaning. Meaning can be conveyed by using colors with symbolic associations and by using colors that work together to create contrast to emphasize other design features. Consider:

- Is the visual only black and white? What might be the reason for the lack of color?

- Where is the most color used? Where is the least color used? What might be the reason for the difference in use of color?
- Do the colors work to create contrast between light and dark? Our eyes are drawn to stark contrasts first. What might the visual be emphasizing through contrast?
- What kinds of emotions do the colors suggest? For example, red suggests passion or anger. Green can suggest envy. Whose emotions might be associated with these suggestions?
- What associations might someone make with the colors? For example, pink and pastel colors are often associated with girls and are considered feminine; blues and other primary colors are often associated with boys and are considered masculine. What other colors have cultural symbolism?

Text and Images

Text is often used in visual messages to connect the images in the visual with the overall message. This meaning can be created through the literal meaning of the words as well as through the graphic representation of the letters themselves. What the text looks like can convey as much meaning, if not more, as the words themselves. Consider:

- What text is in your visual? Is there any fine print? If your visual doesn't have any text, what might the lack of text suggest about the visual's meaning?
- Does the visual have a major headline, or prominent, primary text? How is the headline different from other text in the visual?
- How do the text and the graphics work together with the other features, such as people or color? What does the text literally say through its words?
- Describe the text in terms of font, size, style, and color. What attitude does the text project? Is it serious, silly, scary, or some other attitude?
- What tone does the text use (formal, informal, comic, authoritative, etc.)?
- Are any symbols or logos used? What meaning might they have?

Drafting Activity

Applying Gender to Design Feature Analysis

As the central purpose of this assignment, analyzing gender is a crucial part of your study of each design feature in the Visual Message Analysis Guide. Consider the questions below to help you narrow your analysis to those details of the visual that relate the most to the concept of gender.

- From the notes you have taken above, which features of your chosen visual seem to be gendered? What details from the visual gives you these impressions?
 - What elements of the visual seem “feminine”? What elements seem “masculine”? How do you know?
 - Do the elements in the visual generally reinforce feminine and masculine stereotypes, or do they complicate them? Which, if any, elements seem to reinforce gender expectations and which, if any, seem to complicate them?
 - How does this visual’s message(s) about gender challenge or complicate society’s gender expectations? Which features create the message? How, exactly, do those features convey that idea about gender?
-

Activity

Visual Analysis Memo: Making Connections

For this assignment, you are required to use at least one source to support your analysis. You can independently identify an appropriate source and/or you can apply ideas from the readings in the book; appropriate readings from this chapter include “Sex, Gender, and Social Systems” and Timke and O’Barr’s “Representations of Masculinity and Femininity in Advertisements.” To help you find support for your ideas in a source, create a chart like the one below to connect ideas from sources to the gender-specific messages you’ve identified in your visual.

Gender-Specific Meaning Identified in the Visual	Source Information (include the idea & the location of the idea)	Explain how the source information relates to your visual's gender message

Drafting Activity

Drafting the Analysis

The above activity should help clarify your ideas about your chosen visual as well as help you draft the body paragraphs of your memo. As you continue to develop your analysis, it's important to remember that the body paragraphs of your memo will all share the purpose of analyzing the visual. Because they share the same purpose, each body paragraph will need to perform similar functions. Some paragraphs will achieve their purpose with source material, other paragraphs will focus on the visual's design features, and some might do a mix of both. The different types of information that might be included for analytical body paragraphs are:

1. Body Paragraph without Source Info	2. Body Paragraphs with Source Info
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of a key design feature of the visual • Explanation for how the design feature communicates a message about gender • Sentences that directly state the visual's message about gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of a key design feature of the visual • Explanation for how the design feature communicates a message about gender • Information from a source • Words/phrases that introduce source information • Explanation of how the source information relates to the visual • Sentences that directly state the visual's message about gender

To see how these types of information work in a paragraph, let's look at a student example. Below is paragraph 6 of Sarah Haley's *Visual Analysis of Nike "Thunder Thighs" Ad* (the entire memo is included at the end of the chapter). This is an analytical paragraph that includes source information. The color system used in list 2 above correlates with the colored sentences in the paragraph to identify the function of that sentence within the paragraph.

The variation in colors throughout this ad also makes it come together. The image of the woman's legs is placed in black and white. This is done to draw attention to the advertisement because it is the only object in the frame and has no color. By using black and white it shows the true image and does not cover up or compensate for the muscular legs. It simply shows them and draws the consumer in. The femininity appeal to women is evident by **bolding "I have thunder thighs," in the ad with hot pink**. **Kim Lynn, an interviewee of MSN's online article states, "It's as if they're [Nike] taking a derogatory statement—and making it not be that"** ("Nike" 1–2). **By using the "girly" colors that symbolize love and passion with the negatively associated statement, it suggests that women should love their bodies. This is because women are told by society to be passionate, emotional, and loving. Thus, by using colors that embody love, Nike's message translates to women that they should love their "thunder thighs."** This statement, also, is the only colored text, other than Nike's slogan, which emphasizes even more the focus of the ad. The other sentences, which are in black, zigzagging across the rest of the ad in smaller font, are important to keep the reader engaged but are not the most important subject of the advertisement. The variation in color separates the Nike ad into sections; however, as I have explained, the image's black and white color is to express true beauty and the statement in hot pink is to highlight and add to the image.

The sample paragraph includes all the different types of information that might be expected of an analytical paragraph that includes source information, but you can also see that the paragraph includes a large amount of black text. These parts of the paragraph are not directly developing the analysis of the paragraph's focus (the hot pink text "I have thunder thighs") nor explaining how the quoted source information helps us understand the *gender* message conveyed through the pink text. While the sections of the paragraph that are not colored describe design features and even raise interesting points, these sections might serve better in separate paragraphs that analyze color in different ways. For instance, she might develop a paragraph that analyzes the black-and-white images and how they create or contribute to the ad's gender message; she might also develop another paragraph that analyzes the ad's black text and how it contributes to the gender message in the ad. By reorganizing information, the writer could develop the analysis of each type of design feature—including the analysis of the pink "I have thunder thighs"—more fully and with a clearer sense of purpose.

Drafting Activity

Body Paragraph Self-Evaluation

Once you've drafted at least one of your analytical body paragraphs, use the questions below to analyze the integration of source material into that paragraph.

Identify types of information in your paragraph:

- a. Underline information from a source
- b. Circle words/phrases that introduce or set up source information (attributive tags)
- c. Bracket text where you explain how the source information relates to the visual
- d. Double-underline sentences that directly state the visual's message about gender

Assess what's missing or what needs to be added. For instance: Were you unable to circle any information? If not, introduce the source. Did you only bracket one sentence? How could the explanation that connects the source to your visual be more clear/thorough?

Drafting Activity

Body Paragraph Mini-Workshop

Exchange at least two paragraphs from the body of your paper with your partner. At least one of these paragraphs should include source material. First, you and your partner should explain to each other your overall analytical claims about your respective visuals. Then review your partner's paragraphs and determine which set of questions applies to which paragraphs. Finally, answer the appropriate set of questions below.

For a Paragraph Using Source Material:

1. How is the source information relevant to the visual's message about gender? What work does it do for the writer's overall claim?
2. How might the paragraph introduce, integrate, and/or explain the source more clearly in relationship to the visual's message about gender?

For a Paragraph Without Source Material:

1. How does the specific design feature from the visual create a message about gender? Note that this question isn't asking what the design features says, but *how* it says it. Does the writer include enough information explaining how the design feature supports a gendered message?
2. How does the specific design feature contradict or complicate gender stereotypes and expectations?

Organizing Your Memo

For this assignment, you are adopting the role of an image analyst for a large media outlet; therefore, you will need to use an appropriate, real-world genre such as a professional memo. When formatting your memo, use appropriate headings and white space in a way that helps the reader to understand the content of the different parts of the memo.

You will probably want to organize your memo into at least three main parts that include:

- An **introduction** that states your purpose for writing and what you will discuss in the rest of the memo.
- An **analysis section** that discusses how the features of the visual 1) appeal to the audience, and 2) challenge gender expectations. You may find it helpful to divide this section into subsections using headings that coordinate with section content.
- A **conclusion** that can either restate the main points of your memo, pose new questions that the reader may pursue later, or present a call for action.
- A works cited page.

Remember, too, that each section can have more than one paragraph in it.

Memo Format

Even though the example below is not a model for this assignment's content, you can use it as a template to structure your memo and give you a sense of what it should look like.

To: Pi Beta Phi Executive Board
Cc: Deborah Murray, English 100 instructor
From: Annie Bachman
Date: November 20, 2006
Subject: Involvement of Multicultural Greeks

Introduction

After experiencing my first collegiate homecoming week, a major thing I noticed was the absence of the multicultural Greek organizations in the mix of activities. I find this lack of participation opposite of what K-State strives for—diversity. I have done some research to find out who or what this deficit can be attributed to: communication barriers, event conflicts, and a lack of inclusion of Multicultural Greeks.

Communication Barriers

In my research, I focused most on the fraternities and sororities that are members of the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) and the National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO) on campus. I sent an email to chapter presidents but got little response until Amanda Ebert, the president of Sigma Lambda Gamma, provided an informative response to my questions. Along with the insight she provided, her response also implied that the issue in question was an even more sensitive subject than I had thought. She said she would be “surprised if [I] got any response to this email [because] it is worded poorly and comes off as complete ignorance” (Ebert). I reread my first email, and didn't find anything terribly offensive, but I got the feeling that events in the past gave me an ignorant predisposition in her eyes. Since she and her sorority sisters are a minority group, she probably deals with a lot of ignorance and prejudice from others, which immediately made her doubt my motives for contacting her. She also probably read into my word choice and phrases, making me sound ignorant, despite what I actually said in the email. However, I sent an apology email asking again for more feedback, but to no avail; I only received one more response from Sigma Lambda Beta, the Latino fraternity. So I decided to narrow my focus to the Gammas and their involvement in the Greek system.

The headings at the top of the memo let the reader know who is writing the memo and what the memo is about. Your memo should be addressed to your Supervising Editor.

The introduction of the memo presents your purpose for writing and previews what the rest of the memo will be about. You should make it clear why your audience should care about this topic.

Headings are often used in the body of a memo to help the reader see how the information is organized. Use bold font to make the headings stand out.

Citing Sources

Using citations correctly is a way to show your audience that you have used credible sources of information in your memo. This credibility is especially important when you are writing in a professional situation, such as the scenario created for this assignment. Use the guidelines below to present your memo in a credible and professional way to the reader.

Works Cited Page

When you cite a source from your textbook, you are citing information that has been reprinted. The authors of *(Re)Writing Communities and Identities* found essays that had been previously printed in books, journals, or on Internet sites and received permission to reprint them. Therefore, you must include information about the original place of publication as well as this textbook when writing your citations. The first part of the citation will depend on the type of source (e.g., book, magazine, or journal). The second part of the citation will always be the same for each entry (except for the specific page numbers) because it's the citation for *(Re)Writing Communities and Identities*. For example, the citation for the Timke and O'Barr's article would start with the information about the publication it appeared in. This information would be followed by the abbreviation "Rpt." for reprint and then the information about *(Re)Writing Communities and Identities*. The complete citation for the Timke and O'Barr article is given below:

Timke, Edward, and William M. O'Barr. "Representations of Masculinity and Femininity in Advertising." *Advertising & Society Review*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2017. Rpt. in *(Re)Writing Communities and Identities*, edited by Phillip P. Marzluf et al., 6th ed., New Prairie Press, 2021, pp. 31-54.

If you use a source that isn't from the textbook, use the guidelines from the Handbook at the end of the book.

In-text Citation

When you incorporate source material, it should never have to stand on its own. Note the attributive tags/introductory phrases ("According to . . .") used in the sample paper. Also, be sure to use parenthetical citations, when needed, after any quotations or paraphrases you use. You will use the textbook page numbers for your in-text citation, as in the student example. See Chapter 6 for more information about parenthetical citation.

Activity

Visual Analysis Full Draft Workshop Guide

1. Read the writer's memo and examine her or his chosen visual. What design features does the writer analyze? Do you think these are the most important design features? Why or why not?
2. Has the writer connected these features of the visual message to how it appeals to the intended audience? Where might more explanation be helpful? Mark these places with a star and make suggestions for revision.
3. What is the writer's main analytical point in the memo? Underline this sentence or sentences. If no main point is stated, try to write the main point in your own words.
4. Remember that the most important part of this analysis is to explain *how* the design features work together to create a message that challenges or complicates common gender expectations. Does the writer explain, using the readings and their own analysis, *how* the visual portrays social constructions of gender? Where does that happen in the draft? Put a check mark by the strongest passage of analysis and put [brackets] around a passage that needs more explanation. In the space below, write down questions that the writer still needs to answer.
5. Does the draft meet the bulleted objectives? Look at the Assignment Guidelines at the beginning of this unit and number each objective. For each objective, rate the memo's effectiveness in meeting that criterion 1–5 (5 as excellent, 1 as poor). For any 1, 2, or 3 you give, offer suggestions to the writer for how to improve the memo to meet the objective.

Student Examples

Visual Analysis of Nike “Thunder Thighs” Ad

Sarah Haley

Sarah Haley wrote this visual analysis in Alison Schufelt’s Expos I class.

To: Supervising Editor

From: Sarah Haley

Date: September 12, 2011

Subject: Visual Analysis of Nike “Thunder Thighs” Ad

Introduction: “Just Do It.”

I, like millions of other Americans, can instantly recognize that this simple yet profound statement is the famous slogan used by the multi-billion-dollar Nike Corporation. It is found on billboards, their apparel, in magazines, commercials, and numerous other media. Nike is known not only in the United States, but throughout the world, for their inventive and top of the line athletic merchandise/equipment to improve performance. Being a passionate and dedicated runner myself, I too have bought into Nike’s persuasive slogan that inspires me to “just do it.” Therefore, when I was preparing to purchase some new running shorts for my marathon training, I looked only to Nike to provide the best attire. When doing so, I found a new women’s ad campaign for Nike that reaped the very words I have always told myself while looking troublesomely into the mirror. “I have thunder thighs.” I hated my muscular, toned, and built thighs for years because of how big they were, but there those familiar words read on the Nike Women’s advertisement affirming the statement I hated admitting.

I asked myself, “Could my biggest flaw really be seen by millions in an advertisement around the world?” Nike was making a vivid point that toned women were beautiful, which I was always told in high school was not an idealistic trait of beauty. Therefore, I chose the Nike Women’s ad that states, “I have thunder thighs” to illustrate the various aspects that made many other women and me realize that our bodies deserve compliments. The target audience, layout and color, and text and images all demonstrate Nike’s unique message to women.

Target Audience

Nike not only appeals to athletes, but people all around the world. However, from my analysis, it is apparent that Nike is targeting this ad towards a unique group of women. As stated in Christine Brennan's featured article titled, "In Nike Ad Campaign, Big Isn't Just Better, It's Celebrated" from the USA Today online site, "real women" are being used in the campaign to reach out to the once neglected group of women in media (2)—built, larger, and muscular women. Society continues to pressure women to conform to the accepted stereotype of being petite, thin, and flawless in order to feel beautiful. This Nike ad, however, takes that long standing stereotype and completely deconstructs it. The advertisement based on its image and text was constructed to be accepted by a wide variety of differently shaped active women.

Their advertisement is more or less targeted to a unique audience of "XL body women" and gives them the recently accepted concept in the twenty-first century that they can be happy in their own bodies (Brennan 1–2). The new Nike campaign spokeswoman, Caren Bell, affirms this concept by claiming Nike is trying to "celebrate women" for who they are and not providing a fake body image to achieve ("Nike" 2). Also, this ad is a new campaign for Nike and will be seen by billions of women nationally and internationally and so was created with that in mind to appeal to the mass amount of women who no longer strive to reach perfection with their bodies, but peace. I believe their targeted audience is buying their products, and yet more importantly, buying into their message of acceptance.

Layout and Color Variation

The layout and the color used in the Nike's Women ad are individually important yet share an interesting relationship that causes this ad to stand out. First, the layout is based upon the main image of the muscular, toned legs of a woman in the left of the advertisement. The image is enlarged to draw attention to her first and is also in black and white. Second, the initial statement that reads, "I have thunder thighs," is bolded and colored hot pink with the rest of the advertisement having sentences that are zigzagging across the right in black. The statement is describing the image but creating its own attention all at once.

The layout of the image and the text is designed so that attention is instantly gained by the consumer by invoking a sense of the common ground. Many women know or can associate with "thunder thighs," and, therefore, feel connected to the image and its bold affirming statement. The reason Nike does this is because they are going against what the body image of women is portrayed in society. Instead of showing a picture of a woman's legs in pretty high heels, Nike shows in their ad a muscular toned woman. Therefore, the black and white enlarged image and bolded and centered statement is designed to coincide with one another.

The variation in colors throughout this ad also makes it come together. The image of the woman's legs is placed in black and white. This is done to draw attention to the advertisement because it is the only object in the frame and has no color. By using black and white it shows the true image and does not cover up or compensate for the muscular legs. It simply shows them and draws the consumer in. The femininity appeal to women is evident by bolding "I have

thunder thighs,” in the ad with hot pink. Kim Lynn, an interviewee of MSN’s online article states, “It’s as if they’re [Nike] taking a derogatory statement—and making it not be that” (“Nike” 1–2). By using the “girly” colors that symbolize love and passion with the negatively associated statement, it suggests that women should love their bodies. This is because women are told by society to be passionate, emotional, and loving. Thus, by using colors that embody love, Nike’s message translates to women that they should love their “thunder thighs.” This statement, also, is the only colored text, other than Nike’s slogan, which emphasizes even more the focus of the ad. The other sentences, which are in black, zigzagging across the rest of the ad in smaller font, are important to keep the reader engaged but are not the most important subject of the advertisement. The variation in color separates the Nike ad into sections; however, as I have explained, the image’s black and white color is to express true beauty and the statement in hot pink is to highlight and add to the image.

The Words Create the Image

As I have continuously expressed, the Nike ad wants women to accept their active and toned bodies for what they are, perfect. However, the other words in this ad also define the image and its message even more.

The words that zigzag across the advertisement read as follows, “I have thunder thighs. And that’s a compliment because they are strong, and toned, and muscular, and though they are unwelcome in the petite section. They are cheered on in marathons. Fifty years from now I’ll bounce a grandchild on my thunder thighs and then I’ll go out for a run.”

Now doesn’t that sound like something to be proud of? I cannot think of a better way to accept a body image and numerous other women had the same response to this advertisement. Nike promotes a healthy body image, which is opposite of what women are told by society. They do this because they want women to be proud of what their body is and not feel forced to conform to a petite, slender size that is promoted in the media industry. According to the MSNBC online article, random women were surveyed in Portland, Oregon, and they reported that the words in this advertisement did not suggest a fat woman, but a healthy woman. They could recognize and relate to not only the image, but to all of the words included in the Nike ad (“Nike” 1–2). Nike must be doing something right if they can allow a majority of women to agree on a body image and a motivating and inspiring one at that.

Conclusion

The Nike Women’s Advertisement Campaign that features the “I have thunder thighs” ad truly does empower women to accept their bodies as seen through analysis of their targeted audience, layout and color, and text and image. The clear message that Nike is declaring is body image acceptance, which speaks much farther than my initial need for new running apparel. It made myself realize that I no longer should cover up my own “thunder thighs,” but let them compliment my body like other women have embraced from seeing this advertisement. Who knew that true beauty could lie within muscular, bulky thighs?

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Visual Analysis of "This Girl Can" Ad

Ashley Griffin

Ashley Griffin wrote this visual analysis in Cailin Roles's Expos 1 class. Though Griffin writes about a British advertisement, you will be able to determine how her visual analysis strategies can be useful for an advertisement in the United States.

To: Supervising Editor

From: Ashley Griffin

Date: September 18, 2018

Subject: Visual Analysis of "This Girl Can"

Introduction

For an ad in the 1950s, it was commonplace for a woman to be put in an entirely lower place than a man. The ads told women their only job was to clean and look pretty for their husbands. Today, ads aren't nearly as blatant in their message. However, women are still being subjected to demeaning representation in advertisements. While ads aren't as outright in the harmful messages, many have the same common theme as they did in the 1950s: look good and do what the man wants. Some ads, however, go against this message, and tell women to be strong and unique. These messages can be hard to find, but when they are apparent, they help to uplift women, instead of putting them down. One such ad is from the "This Girl Can" ad campaign, sponsored by the National Lottery.

Description

The ads in the "This Girl Can" campaign focus on empowering women, particularly older women,

and encouraging them to get involved in physical activity. In this ad, there is a middle-aged Black British woman slightly to the right of the center of the image. She is weightlifting with her legs in the ad. She is wearing a look of a determination, and there is sweat on her face. She is wearing mainly gray clothing, with accents of blue, green, and yellow. The background behind her is mainly a bright yellow, with a patch of black near the top. In the center of the ad are the words: “This Girl Can” and then, in bigger font, “Girl. Power.”

Target Audience

This ad seeks to encourage women, especially middle-aged to elderly women, to become more active physically and take charge of their own health. The focus of the ad is a middle-aged woman clearly pushing herself with weights. Her age is very atypical of an ad: usually, ads targeting women won’t choose women that are past their twenties. In fact, many things about her in this ad aren’t usual for a woman’s exercising ad: her clothes, her activity, and her race, for example. She has a look of determination and she’s sweating. She looks powerful and healthy. It sends the message to women that it is possible to do anything they set their minds to and to take control of their own strength.

People

The only person shown in the ad is a middle-aged Black British woman, clearly working hard at exercising, leaning back on a machine, and pushing weights up with her legs. There’s a light sheen of sweat on her forehead. She’s wearing a T-shirt and some leggings, which are not brightly colored or patterned. She’s not particularly thin, but looks healthy. She’s not conventionally beautiful, but still looks very good. This image deviates from the models usually chosen for ads. Women in ads are usually extremely attractive and very thin. Their clothes usually show quite a bit of their skin, and they are posed in a way that emphasizes that. Even in ads for the exercise industry, the model’s hair and makeup is typically flawless and there is not a drop of sweat on her. However, in the “This Girl Can” ad, the woman is very obviously pushing herself, as shown by her fierce look of determination and the sweat on her face. She’s not posed in any sexual way, but instead is focused on the weightlifting.

The woman in the ad is not smiling. She isn’t making an effort to appear attractive: she’s focusing on her task at hand, the weights. Women are rarely portrayed this way. Since society wants women to be pleasing, they are typically shown in ads as very welcoming, happy, and bubbly. This ad, however, twists that stereotype. It’s showing that another’s opinion doesn’t matter and that a woman can take control over her own body.

Her age is also very unusual for an ad. With the stereotype that women need to be attractive and pleasing to men, younger, more fit girls are typically chosen to model. However, this ad chose a middle-aged woman. Society doesn’t really think of older woman as strong too, but this ad is clearly showing her power, regardless of age.

The model’s race stands out as well. Typically, models with lighter or white skin tones are chosen, because these skin colors are represented as more beautiful in Western society.

However, this model is a Black British model with a darker skin tone. The ad is showing her as just as powerful as anyone else, regardless of gender, race, age, or appearance.

Color

Most of the background of the ad is a bright yellow. There's a patch of black shown in the upper left corner. The women's clothes are mainly gray, with accents of green, blue, and yellow. This color scheme is extremely different from the typical woman's ad. Most ads with women are filled with colors that are typically associated with femininity, like pink and purple. As stated by Edward Tinke and William O'Barr, colors such as pink, which is generally associated with femininity, draw a clear line between the sexes, and show the expectations for women to be docile caregivers, instead of strong and independent. These colors showcase a softness, and seem to imply a weakness. However, in the "This Girl Can" advertisement, yellow is the main focus. Yellow is associated with energy, enthusiasm, and increased muscle energy. There are also the accent colors of her clothes. Blue is considered beneficial to mind and body, while green symbolizes growth. All of these colors tell a story of growth, power, and strength, instead of softness and submission, which is what is usually expected of an ad targeting women.

Text

The text in the ad is very simple. In the middle of the left-hand side, small in enclosed in a square, are the words "This Girl Can." Then, bigger and running across the center of the ad, are the words "Girl. Power." These words differ largely from the text usually found in an ad for women. Even in an ad promoting physical activity, women's ads usually have words that make one think of gracefulness, softness, and things of that nature. Words like power are rarely used. However, even in such few words, this ad makes the impression that a woman can actually be strong and powerful, and do whatever she sets her mind to, without the need of being softer or weaker.

The font of the ad also differs strongly from what is normally used for women. Usually, fonts in women's ads are cursive, flowy, and pretty. These, just like the text typically use, imply a softness and quietness, which is what is typically expected of women. However, the font used in the "This Girl Can" ad is plain and simple. It doesn't have any pretty curves or cute little "quirks." It's not saying women should be flowy and pretty, which is typically expected. It's letting them be a normal human being.

Layout

The layout of the ad is very simple. There is the single woman in the ad, weightlifting, and only the one line of text. The focus is less on how pretty the ad can be and how many graphics can fit on the image, and more on the overall message of strength and empowerment. Usually in women's ads, there is a lot of clutter. The words are all over the place; there are graphics stuck to it, and things are made very pretty and cute. This is how the "This Girl Can" advertisement challenges the stereotype of a woman in the way it's laid out: it focuses on the actual message of the ad instead of drawing the eye with how pretty it is. It doesn't assume women will be distracted by pretty pictures and want to buy their product because of some nice graphics. Ads

that do assume these things seem to convey that women are scatterbrained, and easily pleased with “pretty toys.” However, the “This Girl Can” campaign accepts the power of women and made the ad simple to convey that a woman can be just as strong, instead of needing to be soft and pretty.

Conclusion

This “girl power” ad focuses strongly on empowering woman to feel strong and accomplished. The choice of model helps empower women who rarely get a chance to feel so: middle-aged to elderly women, women of color, and women who are not today’s ideal beauty standard. The ad also uses color, word choice, and fonts that are typically used in ads targeted towards men, instead of choosing ones that are typically associated with softness, as another means to help women feel strong and confident. The layout also serves this purpose by deviating from how women’s ads are typically arranged. Each element turns to strengthening women, instead of forcing ideals on them like most modern advertisements. The media needs to incorporate more messages like this in today’s world.

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Visual Analysis of Disney Pixar’s Brave Movie Poster

Sophie Swearingen

Sophie Swearingen wrote this visual analysis in Maggie Cody’s ENGL 100 class.

To: Supervising Editor

From: Sophie Swearingen

Date: February 6, 2020

Subject: “Brave” Enough to Challenge Traditional Gender Stereotypes

Introduction

Since the late 1930s, Walt Disney Studios has created a name for itself as being the primary provider of princess movies, such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty*. In these earlier films, the portrayal of princesses complied with what society considered to be respectable for women living during that—everything that a “perfect lady” should be. The designs of classical Disney Princess advertisements commonly depicted the main female character, perfectly groomed and dressed to the nines, positioned alongside a supporting male character—who, in many cases, played the role of the love interest of the princess. In these advertisements, similar to that of the original *Cinderella* movie, the princess would be shown gazing with a look of fulfilled contentment into the eyes of her “True Love”—almost as if to say that she would never have been sincerely happy with her life if the two had never met.

In this advertisement for the Disney Pixar movie *Brave*, the depiction of the main character, Merida, goes against the customary depiction of a princess, and ultimately challenges the expectations of females in advertisements as a whole. Through the analysis of the various people, the overall layout, and the context present within the visual, the viewer is able to decipher the overall message of the advertisement.

Intended Audience

As an advertisement for a princess movie—and a Disney Princess movie, nonetheless—this visual for *Brave* is predisposed to attract the eyes of a young, female audience. Unlike previous Disney Princess advertisements—which were marketing in order to captivate the “girly-girls” of their target demographic—the “naturalness” and visible athleticism of the princess in this image appeals to the “tomboy” of their female audience. Rather than catering to what is traditionally expected from a Disney Princess, this advertisement presents a unconventional princess to the unconventional girl.

People

One of the predominant design features of this advertisement is the people that are within the visual. At first glance, the viewer is drawn to the prominent adolescent female in the foreground. According to Timke and O’Barr, this diverges from the usual depiction of females in advertisements, who “... are typically pictured as less active and more concerned with their physical appearance and beauty” (75). This female, however, is pictured with wild and unruly hair, similar to that of the males in the background of the visual. Her simple, navy blue dress—that appears to have a large tear at the elbow—also conveys that physical appearance is not something of great importance to her. She is also positioned in a very athletic stance, bearing a bow and arrow in her hands, with a very serious and focused expression upon her face, conveying a message of power, strength, and athleticism—traits more commonly associated with masculine images, according to Timke and O’Barr (68).

While the depiction of the teenage female undoubtedly challenges typical gender expectations in advertising, the other people featured in the background of the visual act in accordance with

these stereotypes. “When men are depicted in paternal roles,” Timke and O’Barr state, “they often appear as adult playmates,” such as the adult male that is present in this visual (85). Additionally, the males in this advertisement do not seem to be concerned with their physical presentation—as demonstrated by their wild and unkempt hair—and are also carrying weapons, which are most commonly associated with masculinity. This depiction of the men, though supporting traditional gender expectations for males, helps to support the argument that the similar presentation of the adolescent female indicates a diversion from the stereotypical female representation in advertising.

Layout

Another element of design that challenges gender expectations is the overall layout of the advertisement. The first thing that is noticeable in this visual is the size of the girl in the foreground. Because she is so prominent, the advertisement gives her a sort of dominance over the other featured characters in the visual, a trait that is most commonly associated with masculinity (Timke and O’Barr 68). Without the teenager present, the advertisement would once again support traditional gender representations. The large stature of the adult male gives him a superiority over the other characters in the background and appears to be their protector—an appearance commonly accredited to males in advertisements. However, by positioning the girl in front of the other characters, and by including the title of the movie, *Brave*, in front of the girl, the visual leads the viewer to assume that she is, in fact, the brave protector of the family, and not the adult male. In this way, the creators of this movie poster are trying to communicate to the viewer that all females, regardless of age, are capable of being brave and standing their ground.

Context

The final design features of the advertisement that gives a significant insight to how it challenges gender expectations are the props that present within the visual. The presence of weapons in the hands of the adolescent female poses as a challenge for stereotypical portrayals of females in advertisements. Weapons are generally used as representations of war, death, and fighting—such concepts that are not ordinarily associated with women, let alone with young women.

Furthermore, the weapon in the hands of the young female is a bow and arrow—a weapon that requires much more skill to use properly than it takes to use the swords present alongside the males. Not only does the presence of the bow and arrow in the girl’s hands signify that she has some about of athletic ability, and is therefore not like other Disney Princesses, but it also indicates that she must be very dedicated to practicing and without a doubt knows how to use it.

Conclusion

Though the movie poster for the Disney Pixar’s movie *Brave* includes aspects that coincide with gender expectations in advertising, its ultimate effect poses as a challenge for the representations of femininity in the media. By analyzing the different design features, it is apparent that had the visual been devoid of the presence of the young female in the

foreground, bearing a weapon that requires skillful operation, in such a dominating stance in comparison to the supporting characters featured, the overall impact of the advertisement would be lost—that to be a princess does not mean that you cannot be tough.

Work Cited

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Visual Analysis of Young Thug's *Jeffery* Cover

Taryn Lubbers

Taryn Lubbers wrote this visual analysis in Hunter Scott's Expos 1 class.

To: Supervising Editor

From: Taryn Lubbers

Date: February 16, 2021

Subject: Gender Analysis of Jeffery album

Introduction

The 2016 album *Jeffery* by Young Thug has a very unique cover that sent shockwaves through the rap community, which was the targeted audience of the album and the cover. The reason the album cover was so staggering, especially in the rap culture, is because of the social gender expectations that were being challenged by Young Thug. He wore a traditional feminine outfit and incorporated many other feminine aspects into the album cover. It is highly unlikely to see a man dressed like this and even more unlikely to see a rapper dressed like this. A lot of his listeners are men who are very much in line with their masculine side which means this cover would most likely not resonate with them. But Young Thug completely abandons the typical male stereotype when it comes to his outfit and does not care what anyone else thinks about him. Men are supposed to adhere only to the traits of masculinity which make them strong and dominant but Young Thug throws out these gender norms and replaces them with his own set of values. He risked his career in order to get his message across and show that men can have a feminine side as well. Through the use of people, colors, and context, Young Thug was able to complicate the traditional standards for masculinity in order to educate his listeners about this gender stereotype. This social construct is challenged by Young Thug posing statically, choosing a contradictory color and a gender-neutral color, and using designer Alessandro Trincone.

People

One key design feature in the album cover is Young Thug himself and this is because he happens to be the only person in the picture. He is a 29-year-old African American man who is married with six kids. But two of the most important things to notice about him are his posture and his gaze. His posture is slightly leaned back and his gaze is at the ground. In an essay titled "Representations of Masculinity and Femininity in Advertisements," Timke and William O'Barr point out that "boys and men were placed in elevated positions of masculine power and strength compared to girls and women, who were often depicted as passive, submissive participant" (Timke and O'Barr). His posture being leaned back and his gaze being down at the ground are usually postures of women. Women are meant to be shown as amenable and demure whereas men are meant to be shown as big and strong. Young Thug's leaned back posture makes him shorter and gives the appearance that he is taking up less space. His gaze downwards also suggests submissiveness which is inherently thought of as feminine. Young Thug is portraying through his posture and gaze that men do not always have to show aspects of strength and dominance for them to be considered successful and masculine.

By analyzing the picture more we can see that Young Thug's positioning also has a story to tell. And that story is that there really is no story being told by the picture. His static position and the lack of context clues in the picture leaves no room for the audience to imagine that there is any activity going on in the image besides standing. Other than his one arm raised, there is no movement in the picture. His other arm is limp at his side and it is easy to tell that there is very little, if any, movement at all in the picture. The background is also very plain with no other images which leaves no context clues to suggest that he is actively doing something. Men are

almost always pictured being active or doing something important while most women are depicted as still and not doing much. Timke and O'Barr write that the media is often "showcasing men actively accomplishing goals, while women were often shown as immobile or passive individuals in a scene" (Timke and O'Barr). By choosing a static pose for his album cover, Young Thug is sending the message that men can be accomplishing goals while at the same time not fitting into the normative gender constructions that men must be active to accomplish such things.

Color

Another important element present in the picture is color. This image is unique because it only has two main colors that dominate the entire picture. The first and most noticeable color present is blue. While young thug's outfit seems to be more feminine than masculine, it is also the color blue which is most often associated with the male gender. However, the dress is a light blue which is much softer than a darker blue. This light blue also seems to have some hints of lavender which adds another layer of meaning as well. Even though blue is seen as masculine, lavender is more closely associated with beauty and femininity. So the color seems to almost contradict itself because overall it is a masculine color but it does have a very strong sense of femininity lying beneath. This color perfectly embodies Young Thug and his message that it is completely normal for men to have a feminine side to them.

The second major color in the album cover is white. The top part of Young Thug's outfit is white as well as a majority of the background. In a technical sense, white is not actually a color but is described as the absence of color. The absence of color can easily be seen as symbolizing the absence of gender lines and stereotypes. The background of the picture is blue at the bottom and slowly fades to white. This can be seen as Young Thug wanting to symbolize the fact that he is blurring these gender lines. The blue fading to white is showing the transition from a society that enforces stereotypical gender constructs to a society where everyone is allowed to express themselves and express their gender however they want. Young Thug is expressing that we have made a lot of progress in the right direction but that we still have a long way to go and that is why he is using his album cover to bring attention to it. The choice to use a color that contradicts itself and another color that has no gender associations at all and then show a clear color gradient between the two, continues the overall theme of the image that men can possess both masculine and feminine attributes.

Context

The outfit that Young Thug wears is quite recognizably the focal point of the image which means that it is the element that challenges the masculine stereotype the most. He is wearing what most people consider to be a feminine outfit: a dress. It is a very elaborate piece of clothing that is made even more feminine by the presence of ruffles and a high waist. The piece was designed in 2016 by Alessandro Trincone and was a part of his "Annodami" collection. When describing his "Annodami" collection, Trincone said, "The emphasis on the waist expresses my idea of protection, redefining tightness as a synonym of strength. The androgynous identity of my inspirational garments reinforces my belief of no-gender boundaries between men and women" (Trincone). The high waist on the dress completely

redefines the masculine stereotype of what it means to be strong. Society tells men that in order to be strong they must be physically capable by being able to move or lift heavy things. Trincone takes this idea of masculine strength and gives it a new meaning by symbolizing strength through a high waist, which is considered feminine. The fact that Young Thug chose this designer and a piece specifically from this collection speaks volumes. He chose a designer who unabashedly designs and promotes androgynous clothes because he wanted to amplify his voice and his message that society's traditional thoughts about masculinity need to be reevaluated. In this way he is able to complicate the gender norm that only females are allowed to wear dresses and other clothes considered feminine.

Conclusion

In summary, Young Thug is able to use his album cover for *Jeffery* to break down society's stereotypes about masculinity. He uses himself, the colors in the image, and the context of the designer to help get his message across. There were several photos taken of Young Thug in the outfit during the photo shoot but he chose the image where he was positioned in a demure and traditionally feminine way. He also chose two very interesting colors to dominate the picture, blue and white. The presence of both colors together and the gradient between them shows the transitioning of society from a restrictive one to a more gender fluid one. And the boldest decision Young Thug makes in regards to his album cover is choosing Alessandro Trincone as his designer. Trincone is a well-known designer who specializes in making androgynous clothes. Choosing a piece from one of Trincone's collections emphasizes that Young Thug is trying to battle against gender norms. Young Thug was able to produce an incredible image and use it to represent his album while also educating his listeners and the rest of the rap community about the normalization of femininity in men.

Works Cited

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Chapter 2

Reading Reflection



Reading Reflection Assignment Guidelines¹

For this assignment, you will carefully read and take notes on a text (an editorial or a reading) that showcases a particular concept, theory, or “big idea” about social identities and communities. You will read “like a believer,” trying to see how these ideas function in the world, and apply the text personally to your life, enabling you to show your understanding of yourself and your communities. In the process, you will develop a main thesis that clarifies your own and your readers’ understanding of the text and how it helps you connect to something significant about yourself. You may also use a personal anecdote or find examples to help clarify the text and your understanding of it.

Your reading reflection will be 1,000-1,200 words long (approximately four double-spaced pages). Your audience will consist of readers such as your instructor and classmates who are interested in how you make significant connections to the reading.

Important: You are **not** writing about what you agree or disagree with in the text; in other words, you are **not** taking a stance or making an argument. By “reading like a believer,” you are placing yourself into a mindset in which you open yourself up to what the author is saying and you try to find moments of resonance and common ground.

In other words, you are expressing how you relate to the text, allowing your readers to learn more about your thinking and yourself. To do so, you will do a “reflective analysis,” demonstrating how your reading of the text was shaped by assumptions and prior conceptions. In other words, you will not be merely focused on the issue or the content of the text – the “what?” – but also on the “how?” and “why?” In short, you need to explore the text, show that you’ve read it carefully and deeply, and explain how it has impacted you and why you hold a particular understanding of it.

Objectives

By the end of this assignment, you should be able to do the following:

- Apply several college-level reading strategies to explore and understand a text
- Summarize a text fairly and accurately to inform an audience
- Develop a main thesis that reflects how a text is personally relevant and significant and how it enables you to show a deeper understanding of yourself
- Clarify your audience’s understanding by providing analysis, explanation, anecdotes and examples, or other contributions
- Practice writing moves that engage your readers and that show respect towards the issue, the author(s) of the text, and your readers

¹ The water droplet image was produced by Brocken Inaglory, *Wikimedia Commons*, 2007, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:GGB_reflection_in_raindrops.jpg.

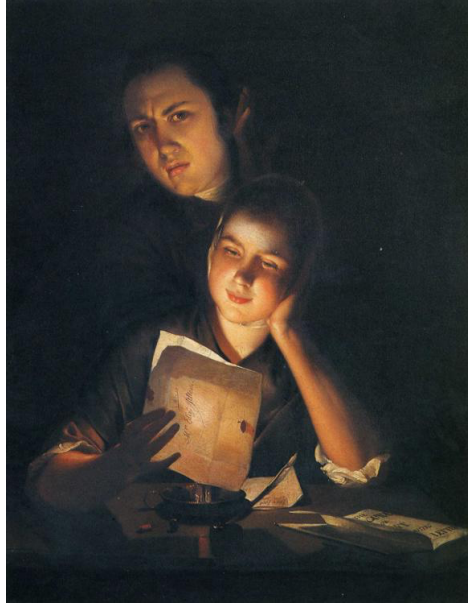
- Practice attributes and qualities that will make you a more successful college-level writer, including curiosity, perseverance, openness, creativity, and flexibility

Rationale

The Reading Reflection enables you to practice several skills, strategies, objectives and student learning outcomes, and habits of mind that are important to becoming a successful college student and writer. First, you will practice college-level strategies for reading (e.g., note-taking and questioning) and writing (e.g., summarizing and freewriting). You will gain practice in reflecting, which you may need to demonstrate in professional classes and in personal statements for educational and career opportunities. Reflection also helps develop critical thinking skills, your awareness of the self, and your understanding of diversity, which correspond to two of the undergraduate student learning outcomes, Critical Thinking and Diversity. In terms of the ENGL 100 course objectives, this assignment allows you to

- Demonstrate critical thinking and problem solving when analyzing important social and cultural issues.
- Demonstrate competence in academic reading and writing strategies (note-taking, summarizing, and identifying main ideas) and reflect upon your writing process.
- Guide your readers with appropriate organizational strategies and meet expectations of tone and style.

The reading reflection, finally, asks you to adopt a mindset that can allow you to practice and demonstrate student qualities and habits of mind that will help make you more successful in your classes and your career. By undergoing this reflective process, you will need to foster your curiosity, creativity, and openness as you make connections between your life and the key concepts or, quite possibly, uncomfortable experiences and ideas that appear in the reading. You will also need to be persistent and flexible, qualities that will help you as you read and re-read, explore a main thesis, and manage a complicated writing project.



Separating a Reading Reflection from an Argument²

To emphasize the differences between a reading reflection and an argumentative or opinionated response – in which you are showing what you agree or disagree with in an author’s editorial – we look at two ways of working with Kim Stagliano’s. “My Three Daughters are Autistic. I Despise Autism Awareness Month.”³

Here is a brief summary of this editorial:

In her controversial “My Three Daughters are Autistic. I Despise Autism Awareness Month,” Kim Stagliano argues that Americans need to stop defining autism as a condition that should be celebrated and even found desirable. Rather, she wants to remind her readers that autism has profound negative effects on people and severely limits their educational and social opportunities.

An Argumentative Response (What You’re Not Being Asked To Do)

In an argumentative or “opinionated” response, you might decide to disagree vigorously with Stagliano’s points, claiming that Stagliano has a narrow view of what it means to be “normal” and using evidence to show how people with autism make important contributions to society.

² The painting is by Joseph Wright of Derby, “Girl Reading a Letter by Candlelight with a Young Man Peering Over Her Shoulder,” *Wikimedia Commons*, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Joseph_Wright_of_Derby._Girl_Reading_a_Letter_by_Candlelight,_With_a_Young_Man_Peering_over_Her_Shoulder._c.1760-62.jpg

³ Stagliano, Kim. “My Three Daughters are Autistic. I Despise Autism Awareness Month.” *The Washington Post*, 2 April 2015. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/04/02/my-three-daughters-are-autistic-i-despise-autism-awareness-month/>.

Additionally, you could counter her stance on Autism Awareness Month, claiming that these types of events do not celebrate this condition but provide more attention for additional support and treatment. Or, you might consider a combination of agreeing and disagreeing, in which you agree with Stagliano about our need to recognize the challenges of those who experience serious Autism Spectrum Disorder, yet then show how people with autism reflect the variety of possible ways of living and thinking in the world.

While crafting an argument in response to a text is a crucial skill (and one that you'll practice in ENGL 200), we're asking that you *not* respond in this way for this assignment. Instead, we ask that you reflect on the piece in the ways described below.

Reading Reflection (What You Are Being Asked To Do)

Instead of asking you to show readers your opinions or positions on an issue, reflective reading puts you into a different mindset, one in which you are interested in showing how you relate to a text and to help readers — and yourself — understand why you had those thoughts and feelings. In short, you are expressing a personal take on the article and the issue; your readers will learn something about the issue as well as about you.

Returning to Stagliano's "My Three Daughters are Autistic. I Despise Autism Awareness Month," you might guide your readers to a personal thesis about how Stagliano's editorial — especially as she is writing from the perspective of a mother about her three children — makes you feel extremely uncomfortable. You might then try to figure out why you feel so uncomfortable — is it, perhaps, because of assumptions you hold about American motherhood and how mothers are always represented as being 100% supportive of their children? Maybe you've heard many examples of parents of children with severe physical and cognitive challenges, who "celebrate" their children and talk about them in terms of "gifts" that have enhanced their lives. So, are you angry with Stagliano for how she performs her role as a mother and for how she talks about her daughters? If so, what does this say about you? Is there a way to find sympathy towards Stagliano's position?

When you start reflecting on the text in these personal ways and using the reading reflection questions, you will see how you are pursuing different writerly moves and interacting differently with the text and with your readers, developing a deeper understanding of the text and of the assumptions and experiences we, as readers, bring to the text.

The following table summarizes the key differences between argumentative and reflective writing:

Argumentative Response	Reading Reflection
<p>Purpose: You contribute to a controversial issue and hope to persuade your readers.</p> <p>Audience: Readers who may hold different perspectives on the issue.</p> <p>Typical writing moves: You summarize the text, and then you identify an overall claim or position on the issue, which you support with reasons and with evidence, usually from secondary sources.</p>	<p>Purpose: You demonstrate your personal understanding and stake in the text; you want to show your readers how you relate to the text.</p> <p>Audience: Readers interested in how you personally respond to a text; readers who want to learn more about you.</p> <p>Typical writing moves: You summarize the text, and then you focus your readers on an overall reflective thesis or main point, which you then explore through different angles or vectors: your assumptions, your explanation of your thinking processes, your personal experiences and anecdotes, among other possibilities.</p>



Reading & Writing Moves

Paying Attention to Format

Even before you start reading an article, you can find out a lot about its main ideas and organization by looking at the title, the sub-title, and section headings, if they are available. Before you actually start reading the article, take a look at these elements and start to make some predictions on important points and concepts that you think you might see.

For example, from the main reading in Chapter 1, Edward Timke's and William M. O'Barr's article, you will see the title and the four section headings:

Representations of Masculinity and Femininity in Advertisements

1. Introduction

2. Representations of Masculinity and Femininity in Advertisements from 2006

3. Advertisements Ten Years Later: Some Changes, But Not So Many

4. A Gender-Fluid Future?

How can this be helpful as you plan your reading? You'll already know a great deal of the scope and focus of this article: it's intended to explore representations of gender in advertisements, and you have a sense of historical context: the second section focuses on advertising in 2006 and the third section focuses on 2016; you even have an idea about how Timke and O'Barr characterize the differences between these two periods. Finally, you have another concept, that of gender fluidity, which the authors will explore at the end. Thus, here are the key concepts that the title and headings provide:

- Advertisements
- Femininity
- Gender fluidity
- Masculinity
- Representations
- Historical changes

While the title and headings won't give the whole "story" of the article, recognizing some of the key ideas before reading can help you read with more focus and direction.

Stock Reading Reflection Questions

As you begin reading (and writing), these following reading questions will place you in the right frame of mind to conduct the reading reflection:

- What is the main point of the text?
- How does the text reinforce or challenge assumptions or pre-existing ideas?
- How does the text help you explore _____ (the issue or concept)?
- What do you know about _____? Where does this knowledge come from?
- How do you relate to the text?
- What is something that you find to be surprising in the text?
- What is still unclear and confusing for you? Why?
- What can you learn about yourself from reading and thinking about this text?
- What connections can you make to your own life experiences outside of class?

You can use these types of questions as you read and take notes; additionally, you may find them useful as you begin to reflect on the reading and generate ideas for your initial drafts.

Active Reading

More likely than not, you will be reading the article on a digital screen – maybe even on the small screen of your cell phone. Although research is still coming to grips with the ramifications of this sudden shift in reading habits, you will still want to find opportunities to take notes and demonstrate your understanding of the text. By “active reading,” we mean exactly that – commenting and responding by marking up your reading, which could mean finding ways to highlight/underline, using commenting or “sticky note” features on a pdf reader, or devoting a Word file or notebook to collect notes. You may end up using all of these strategies as you actively read.

Although the process for how you are taking notes, annotating, and marking up the text may differ drastically from those of students even ten years ago, your overall goals and note-taking content will remain the same:

- Notes and/or highlighting/underlining that emphasize or summarize the main points (in other words, focus on what the author is saying)
- Notes and/or highlighting/underlining that focus on examples, specifics, and key quotations (consider the important evidence the author is using)
- Questions that help promote your own understanding of the text and the issue
- Comments that link to other readings, concepts, or your personal experiences
- Comments that identify the goals or intentions of the author (in other words, focus on what the author is doing and explore why)

Here is one brief example, using a paragraph from Edward Timke's and William M. O'Barr's "Representations of Masculinity and Femininity in Advertisements"

Disagreeing with the "Ungendered" article and comparing 2006 with 2016 ads.

In comparing advertisements from 2006 to 2016, there are some changes, but not as many as *Adweek's* "Ungendered" piece would lead one to believe. Although some gender fluidity is seen in many advertisements depicting Millennial metrosexuals, girls and women still are seen enacting rituals of subordination. Hierarchies along gendered lines still persist, leading one to question how far changes have come for breaking from longstanding gender divisions.

How has the medium of ads – shifting from print magazines to online – been involved in these changes with gender?

Gendered hierarchies still exist, despite some changes.

In these notes, the reader is doing the following:

- Highlighting an especially interesting phrase from the paragraph ("enacting rituals...")
- Indicating what the authors are doing ("Disagreeing...")
- Summarizing what the authors are saying ("Gendered hierarchies...")
- Pointing out a limitation in the reading with a question ("How has the medium..?")

Reading as a Believer

When you read a text, you are asked to demonstrate your openness and flexibility, two key "soft skills" and attributes of the successful writing mindset. When you read "like a believer," you are being asked to temporarily tune out all of your doubts, concerns, disagreements, and responses. When reading as a believer, you want to understand where the author is coming from and reflect on their assumptions – as well as your own. Peter Elbow explains the mindset of acceptance that is necessary when reading as a believer:

The believing game is the disciplined practice of trying to be as welcoming or accepting as possible to every idea we encounter: not just listening to views different from our own and holding back from arguing with them; not just trying to restate them without bias; but actually trying to believe them. We are using believing as a tool to scrutinize and test. But instead of scrutinizing fashionable or widely accepted ideas for hidden flaws, the believing game asks us to scrutinize unfashionable or even repellent ideas for hidden virtues. Often we cannot see what's good in someone else's idea (or in our own!) till we work at believing it. When an idea goes against current assumptions and beliefs—or if it

seems alien, dangerous, or poorly formulated—we often cannot see any merit in it.⁴

What Elbow is asking you to do is to delay the gut reactions you may be experiencing as you read the text: oftentimes, these negative gut reactions may come from an emotional source or from a feeling that you – or a community with which you identify – are being unfairly scrutinized or categorized. Though you may want to note down some of those emotional gut reactions, you also want to show your ability to listen to alternative perspectives and try to understand those from communities beyond yours. To be clear, that does not mean you are being asked to accept these ideas; instead, you are being asked to better understand what these ideas are, where they come from, and how they function for those who hold them.

Exploring Key Concepts & Quotations

One useful strategy to explore ideas is to find a few key concepts or fruitful quotations from the reading. Look for terms that appear in the title or in headings and that are repeated by the author. By “key concepts,” we mean the vocabulary of our social and cultural world that you may have already encountered.

For the quotations, find those that you found “stuck” with you – that is, they were significant and/or helped you understand the main message of the reading.

For example, from Rebecca Carroll’s, “As a Black Woman Raised by White Parents, I Have Some Advice for Potential Adopters,” here are some key concepts:

- transracial adoptions
- systemic racism
- internalization
- stereotyping

Here is an informal freewriting moment from a writer who made personal connections to the concept of “transracial adoptions” and started to question their assumptions; this initial writing will then lead, after some revision, to the major thesis that they present in the Reading Reflection Example.

I’ve had conversations about transracial adoptions, even down to whether it is more acceptable for white parents to adopt African-American children rather than Asian children, as black children will still be able to recognize themselves in other black people and finds ways to express their cultural connections, whereas the Asian children will be separated geographically, culturally, and linguistically. They will be completely separated. Yet, having just thought this, I also have to take stock of my assumptions: in

⁴ Elbow, Peter, “The Believing Game—Methodological Believing.” *The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*, vol. 5, 2008, scholarworks.umass.edu/eng_faculty_pubs/5.

this case, the expectation is that it will be white parents who are the norm, who will be making decisions about the racial or cultural identities of the children they will be adopting.

From the same text, readers may find these two following quotations to be memorable and worthy of spending some more time on:

“Our beauty does not exist because you have given it to us.”

“Your naivete may be legitimate, but if you legitimately don’t understand how systemic racism works, or the ways in which it will target your child specifically and often, then maybe you shouldn’t adopt a Black child. And I mean that in the kindest way possible.”

What could you get out of these quotations? Where could they lead you when you start to consider your own reflection? How could you possibly incorporate these direct quotations in your own draft? Here are two examples of freewrites based on these quotations:

- Carroll is getting at something of the “arrogance” of the relationship between white parents and the children they adopt who may not share their same race or background; these parents may possess unconsciousness biases about race and the superiority of their own position; Carroll is making a statement that the adopted child’s beauty and worth stands for itself – it’s not a value that is bestowed upon them.
- By “kindest way possible,” we get a glimpse into Carroll’s world – here, she is talking directly to her own parents or to those who are extremely similar, and expressing this mixture of love and of teaching; she is showing those painful moments in which the child needs to become the teacher and bring up important issues, such as systemic racism, that they may not have to face but that their students will have to confront (not to mention the fact that the entire situation of white adopting parents is itself an example of systemic racism).

Generating Ideas with Class or Discussion Board Talk

Similar to discovering a thesis by freewriting, talking with others can also help you develop your ideas. That’s why, whether in class or as a part of online discussion boards or activities, your instructor will allow you some time to talk through your ideas with other students who are working and reflecting on the same reading. Use these opportunities to clarify your understanding of the reading and to come to grips with this sophisticated type of writing. Figure out how your classmates have interpreted the assignment and how they are attempting to relate and make personal the reading. Share your ideas and learn from this productive writing community. If you are participating in an online conversation, remember to go back to the discussion after it has been “closed” in order to read what was posted after you completed the assignment and gain some additional insights from your classmates.

Summarizing

Summarizing is going to be an important part of the writing that you do at the college level, in particular when you are asked to find secondary research sources and report them fairly and accurately. Summarizing is also related directly to your active reading and notetaking methods, as you are trying to come to grips with what the author is saying – what are their main points? – and what are they doing – what are their goals and purposes?

For your reading reflection, you want to represent the text for your readers and satisfy them enough that they do not need to turn to the original source that you are reflecting on. To do this, you must make sure that your summary is

- **Comprehensive** (it represents the key ideas from the full reading)
- **Concise** (it is manageable and accessible for your readers)
- **Fair** (it demonstrates that you can “read as a believer” and report the reading to your readers in a balanced and objective fashion)
- **Accurate** (it conveys the main ideas that best represent the intentions of the author)

According to Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein⁵, when it comes to accuracy, you’ll want to watch out for the “closest cliché syndrome,” when you place an author’s main point into a more typical or simplistic frame that you are already familiar with. For example, when summarizing Terry Tempest Williams’s environmental editorial, “Will Our National Parks Survive the Next 100 Years?” a writer placed the author’s issue into the debate about global warming and climate change, because Williams referred to the “political temperature in Washington”; yet, Williams was making a point about the conflicts between politicians and never said a thing about global warming. In the case, the writer of the summary was accidentally using the “closest cliché,” placing this editorial in an argument about climate change because that is the common expectation of environmental writing. Similarly, sometimes when reading about a potentially controversial issue, readers will distill complicated arguments in unfair and cliché ways. For example, (mis)summarizing Stagliano as arguing that people with disabilities aren’t as worthy as those without disabilities, or acting as if Carroll is arguing that white people should never adopt non-white children.

To avoid problems such as “the closest cliché” and other forms of misrepresenting texts, here are some best practices for writing summaries:

- **Identify the author and the text that you are summarizing in the first line of your summary:** In Rebecca Carroll’s *Washington Post* editorial, “As a Black Woman Raised by White Parents, I Have Some Advice for Potential Adopters,” ...
- **Focus your readers immediately on the overall main point of the reading:** In this editorial, Carroll argues that white parents who adopt African-American children need to become more aware of systemic racism and their responsibilities for raising their children in ethical and sensitive ways.

⁵ Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say, I Say*. 5th ed. W. W. Norton, 2021.

- **Organize according to the informational logic of the reading;** do not organize according to the paragraph-by-paragraph organization of the reading: Rather than following the chronological organization of the original text (e.g., “First, she says this, then she says that...”), begin with the most important points of the original text, providing any supporting points or evidence necessary for the reader to fully understand it.
- **Write in the present tense and use active verbs to show what the writer is saying and doing:**
 - Carroll acknowledges that...
 - Carroll points out that...
 - Carroll argues that...
 - Carroll informs white parents that...
 - Carroll contends that...
 - Carroll uses her personal experience to...

Activity

Evaluating Summaries

Take a look at these two following summaries of Sarah Garland’s “When Class Became More Important to a Child’s Education than Race.” In the first draft, identify the concerns that readers will have, based on the best practices for writing summaries. Then, in the revised draft, list the changes that the writer has made. For the readers, how is the revised draft now more comprehensive, concise, fair, and accurate?

First Draft of Summary (180 words):

One thing that I found very interesting in Sarah Garland’s article was when she made comparisons of two families, the Klaitmans and the Lynches; by making these comparisons, she was able to show how social class in the United States is relative to the region or city where you live. In fact, the Klaitmans, who have a great deal of money to bestow upon their children, claim that they are “middle-class New Yorker[s]” but “upper-class anywhere else” (131). Something that didn’t sit as well with me, though, was that Garland had an obvious agenda when it came to chartered schools. Of course, chartered schools may have some problems, but why doesn’t she consider them to be a viable option at solving the problem with inequality and poverty, especially as she indicates that chartered schools enable poor students to succeed (134). In conclusion, Gardner’s article is an important one because of the fact that it argues that race is no longer as important in deciding upon a child’s future; instead, “how much income their parents earn is more and more influential.”

Revised Summary (162 words):

In “When Class Became More Important to a Child’s Education than Race,” Sarah Garland shows that increasing inequality in the United States leads to a larger gap in educational outcomes between highly affluent families and those from middle-class or poorer families; in fact, social class, according to Garland, is a better indicator for future economic and educational success now than race. Garland uses statistics from several research studies to demonstrate how the achievement gap and social inequality have increased over the past fifty years. Additionally, she uses anecdotes from two representative families to show how wealthier families can provide many more educational resources for their children and connect themselves to a social network about parenting. Garland lists several policy recommendations to offset educational inequalities and provide poorer families with more spending money. She also briefly touches upon other education-based solutions, including charter schools, though she reports that the evidence is mixed regarding the degree to which they can reduce the achievement gap. (162 words)

Discovering a Thesis

One key difference with working on your reading reflection is that you may not be completely sure what your main idea – your controlling focus or thesis – is going to be. In more simplistic writing contexts, especially those in timed testing formats, you need to immediately come up with a thesis and several sub-points. Look at this following example, one for which you would need to generate a main idea within seconds:

Medieval Asian History (50 points; 20-minuted timed essay)

Question: Although the “Great Man” theories of history are oftentimes questioned, focus on the contributions of one important military leader, Chinggis Khan, and explain at least two important contributions he had on Europe and the rest of the world.

Student’s main thesis: In the thirteenth century, Chinggis Khan’s influence on Europe was immense. First of all, the massive empire that he founded provided a lot of commercial and intellectual exchanges between the West and the East. Second, the attacks of Chinggis Khan’s son’s armies on eastern Europe helped unite several European Christian elites. Third, the Khan’s *zasag*, or set of laws, demonstrated to Europeans that other systems of politics were possible.

While this demonstration of your factual knowledge is important in many contexts, your reading reflection is going to allow for more time and consideration, in which you should begin to freewrite and draft, a process which will then allow you to discover what your own main ideas are. In short, you should practice using writing as a form of thinking, a strategy to come up with and develop your ideas and your main point. By going through this process of discovering a thesis, you are again practicing some of the mindset or “soft skills” that are

required for reflective writing: you are showing your flexibility and curiosity and your ability to think through complicated ideas rather than quickly jumping to a conclusion.

Exploring Significance

Significance is one of the most important aspects of informative and expressive writing. Significance consists of those moments when you acknowledge why your main point and your reflection is important, both to yourself and to your readers. When you ask yourself these types of questions, such as “So what?,” “Who cares?,” “What contribution did you make?,” or “What is at stake?,” you are telling your readers why your reflective contribution is significant.

Without making clear your significance, your readers may not understand why your response and reflection on the text are important for *them* (or others) to read and understand.

Typically, when we consider significance, we can write about it in three ways:

- **Significance for your culture and society:** How might your reflection contribute to how your readers understand this text and the larger issue it addresses?
- **Significance for the academic field or larger public conversation:** How might your reflection contribute to the academic conversations in which the reading and your reflection are situated? What new insights or ways of looking at the world can be useful in future discussions?
- **Significance for yourself:** Why was this reflection important for your own learning and your own development, as a student, thinker, person, and writer? What did you get out of this type of reading and writing?

Although you can articulate significance in several places in your reading reflection, you may find the conclusion as a particularly useful place; your conclusion is a good place to emphasize these final points that you want to stick with your readers.



Organization

Unlike a five-paragraph theme, a timed essay exam, or other “closed-form” types of writing, your readers will not have stringent expectations for what to expect in the organizational strategy of your reading reflection. You therefore have many options as you guide your readers through your reflection, interest them, summarize the reading for them, identify your own reflective thesis, and explore your understanding and the significance of what you are doing.

Below, you’ll see a template that can get you started, but while you likely need to include all of the points below, many of them can be arranged in a different order, depending on how you want to interact with your own readers and engage them.

Organizational Template

- **Focus your readers with a specific title** (revise your title as you write, as you want to make sure it reveals your overall reflective point)
- **Introduce** your readers to the overall issue (e.g., cross-racial adoptions, gender and the representation of women’s bodies in sports); avoid overly broad and general “Since the beginning of time” introductions
- **Forecast** to your readers what you are going to do in your reflection
- **Summarize** the reading usefully for your readers; the summary should be strong enough to invite readers who have not already read the editorial or text to your reflection
- **Identify an overall main reflective point or thesis**
- **Develop** the main thesis with sub-points, which further allow your readers to see how you are relating to the article, understanding it, and grappling with its complexity and challenges
- **Clarify** your main thesis by contributing a personal experience, additional examples, or a secondary (research) source
- **Conclude** by highlighting the significance of the reading and your reflection on your own thinking and the ways in which you view the world

Paragraph-Level Organization

Although the broad level of organization is important, when you consider the different sections of your reading reflection, you can also focus on a more specific level of organization – the paragraph itself.

Within your body paragraphs, you have many decisions and possibilities, yet here are three ways to make sure you are guiding your readers:

- **Using Topic Sentences.** Early on in a body paragraph, provide your readers with your point or purpose, or remind them about what your overall main thesis is; this topic sentence helps to focus and prepare your readers.

- **Distinguishing main points from sub-points, examples, and explanation.** Use transitional phrases and readerly cues to signal to your readers what to expect; a simple “For example” phrase can be a powerful way to reach out to your readers.
 - **Introducing paraphrasing or direct quotations.** If you are using paraphrases or direct quotations from secondary research sources, guide your readers by introducing these moments; afterwards, you can then explain the information from the secondary source and/or justify why you used this source.
-

Activity

Revising Paragraph-Level Organization

Take a look at the following two examples, the first of which many readers may find difficult to read because of its internal paragraph organization. Ask yourself: Where do you find yourself getting lost? What is the main focus, point, or purpose of this paragraph?

Then, read the second example and list the revision moves that you see. What has the writer done to enhance their organization. What are specific examples of the internal-paragraph organizational strategies. These paragraphs relate back to Rebecca Carroll’s “As a Black Woman Raised by White Parents, I Have Some Advice for Potential Adopters.”

First Draft:

Brian Street is a well-known educational expert, whose research is helpful in figuring out how young people come up with their identities. According to Street, we all have a dominant identity or community that we belong to – that is the family: we feel comfortable in the language and ways of being and acting within this family; this is where we feel “natural.” “Early in life, we all learn a culturally distinctive way of being an ‘everyday person’, that is a non-specialized, non-professional personal” (153).⁶ Maybe my own experience growing up in a family where I felt “natural” – one in which I didn’t question my language choices, my appearance, or my culture – makes it more difficult for me to relate to what Carroll is going through in her editorial. What happens when you don’t look like your parents? What happens when your language or dialect doesn’t feel “natural” to you? What happens, in other words, when you do not feel comfortable in your own primary identity – that of your family?

⁶ Gee, James Paul. *Social Linguistics and Literacies*. 4th ed. London: Routledge, 2012.

Revised Draft:

While reflecting on Carroll's editorial, an important realization that I made was my simplistic assumptions about family structures as those places where young people felt comfortable and "natural." I have never considered the family as a place where young people could feel conflicted and alienated. In our society and in research, this assumption about the family as a comfortable, nurturing space is extremely common. For example, Brian Street, a well-known educational expert, has defined the family as one important place to form the dominant identity and community of people. According to Street, before we become students, members of the public, or professionals, we first learn a basic identity, in which we feel "natural": "Early in life, we all learn a culturally distinctive way of being an 'everyday person', that is a non-specialized, non-professional personal" (153). Yet, what happens when we apply Street's quotation to Carroll's points? What she is getting at, after all, is a situation in which the family space conflicts in many ways with how the child may identify themselves or feel about themselves. Carroll is defining the family no longer as this "warm and comfortable" space of nurturing, and making it into one that is far more political and ideological.

Tone: Showing Fairness & Objectivity

Oftentimes, when we talk about tone, we are talking about the attitude that you are showing towards the issue, the author, and the reading you are reflecting; toward yourself and your writing; and toward your own readers. In ENGL 100 and in other informative writing situations, you can think about tone in terms of formality – informal writing that shows more intimacy and closeness with your readers and the issue, as opposed to more formal writing that shows more distance with your readers.

In a reading reflection, tone is also an important way to talk about the ways in which you are interacting with the reading and the impression that you are crafting for your readers. In this rhetorical situation, you want to come across as being fair, balanced, flexible, and objective. Importantly, you want to demonstrate these qualities even if you find yourself feeling extremely negative towards the points of the author.

Remember your purpose: you are not agreeing or disagreeing with the reading, but, instead, you are reflecting on your understanding of the issues in the reading. It is perfectly acceptable to announce the fact that an editorial makes you feel uncomfortable and disturbs your own assumptions and beliefs. You may even be able to form a main thesis by exploring what is at the heart of this conflict between you and the editorial. However, you still want to come across fair and objective. You are demonstrating your ability to reflect on an issue without immediately shifting into a rant or an argument.

Here are a few strategies to demonstrate your objective and fair tone:

- In your summary, make sure you are choosing words that represent the author's position fairly; pay attention to the verbs that you use to describe what the author is doing. For example, look at these two sentences:
The author **acknowledged** that women's bodies were more sexualized in sports reporting.

The author **whined** that women's bodies were more sexualized in sports reporting.

There is a large tonal shift between "acknowledged" and "whined"; in the latter, you are making a harsher judgment about the author and what they are doing.

- Think about your pronouns; instead of the traditional "I" and "he or she" (for the author you are reflecting on), consider "we" or other ways of bringing you and the author together: "Despite the vast differences in our experiences and our political beliefs, the author and I both value the importance of financial markets in changing the attitudes of people towards race."
- Check your privilege and acknowledge your own perspective; if you are feeling uncomfortable reflecting on a reading from an author whose experiences or social identities are far different from yours, you may want to acknowledge this fact. Tell your readers why you may find it hard to understand another perspective.
- Use phrases that qualify and temper your points; these small tonal cues can be important ways to connect to the emotional lives of your readers:

Though readers may disagree with me, I...

One hesitation that I have is...

I acknowledge the fact that the writer...

As someone with different political views, it is understandable that...

Despite our differences, I appreciate the fact that the author...

Style: Using Language That Sticks

"Stickiness" is a writing concept that reflects how memorable your ideas are for your readers. As you are drafting and revising, ask yourself how you can make your words resonate with your readers. How can you make them stick?

One way is by using vivid, concrete language and trying to make your writing more specific and active; in order to do this, you will need to pay more attention to your main nouns and verbs and examine how they are related.⁷

Here are a few recommendations for making your language stick:

- Avoid cliches, because these, by definition, are not going to be concrete and precise; your readers will have heard them before and so they won't be memorable or meaningful.
- Watch out for overly repetitious starts to your sentences. Be especially vigilant against using too many sentences that start with such noun-verb phrases as "This is...." "These could...," or "There is."
- Try to vary your sentence lengths and structures.
- Avoid relying too much on forms of *to be*: am, is, are, was, were, will be.
- When you use pronouns, such as "it" and "this," make sure your readers know what they are referring to.
- Reconsider vague nouns or descriptors, such as "stuff," "things," "huge," and "very."

Activity

Revising Sentence Style

Here are several examples that readers will not find particularly "sticky." Try to diagnose the stylistic concerns and consider some revisions:

That is a huge point that was made by the author!

There are two ways in which I could relate to the said discussion about socioeconomic things in Garland's essay.

Carroll really knocked it out of the park when she mentioned stereotypes and explained how it affected young children.

However, this may not be acceptable for many of the readers.

⁷ You may find Richard Lanham's "Paramedic Method" useful as a way to get started; see "Paramedic Method: A Lesson in Writing Concisely." *Purdue Online Writing Lab*, https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/paramedic_method.html



Example Reading Reflection

This example reflects on Rebecca Carroll's "As a Black Woman Raised by White Parents, I Have Some Advice for Potential Adopters." At 1289 words, it can provide a sense of the scope and purpose of this type of reflective writing; it can also serve as a basic formatting guide for your own reflection.

Student's Name

Instructor's Name

ENGL 100

Date

Understanding Cross-Racial Adoptions

Rebecca Carroll's *Washington Post* editorial, "As a Black Woman Raised by White Parents, I Have Some Advice for Potential Adopters," opens with a drawing of a black girl holding hands with two white adults, who join a larger group of white people wearing casual clothes and who walk into a field of whiteness. Importantly, the child is looking back – looking right into the eyes of the reader – me. Her face is the only one that I can see.

This drawing does a great deal in quickly conveying the main themes of this editorial – which is extremely painful and courageous, especially as Carroll is focusing readers on the most

intimate of relationships – that between the child and parents – and recasting this relationship in terms of race and systemic racism. Although Carroll is not writing a piece advocating that white parents stop adopting black children, she is making several points about how these white parents – and, in this case, the readers are to understand that she is talking directly to her own white parents – are participating in a racist system, although they may not be completely aware of what they are doing. White parents with black adopted children may resort to stereotyping and fetishizing with the ways in which they talk about their children. White parents, moreover, may have little knowledge of black cultural and social leaders and they may have no connections to black cultural forms and to members of the black community. Carroll stipulates that these white parents are practicing racist beliefs and supporting systemic racist structures by hoping that their black adopted children grow up in a “colorblind” – that is, white – world. Carroll’s editorial is confessional – in this case, she is confessing to her white parents that she recognizes their complicity in racism despite the fact that they were “incredibly loving White parents”; Carroll writes, “[I]f you legitimately don’t understand how systemic racism works, or the ways in which it will target your child specifically and often, then maybe you shouldn’t adopt a Black child. And I mean that in the kindest way possible.” Again, with this last line, Carroll is being extremely personal; in an editorial that is meant to address the issues of transracial adoptions and to speak to white parents, she is doing this work by calling out what her parents have done to her.

As a parent of two children, I tried to imagine myself reading this editorial for the first time as I were Carroll’s primary audience – parents who had adopted African-American children or, for that matter, children who were considerably different than them for race, linguistic,

social class, or other reasons. What must these parents be feeling? Hurt? Resentful? Angry? But, also, quite possibly feeling guilty and complicit? Of course, my personal experience is limited when it comes to Carroll's argument: my children and I never had to question the community and the identity that they were brought up in, although we did want them to realize that their skin color, language, and social class were not universal norms and identities; we dutifully clicked "diversity" as one of the most important qualities when enrolling them into daycare centers. We have several white friends and acquaintances who have adopted or served as foster parents for African-American children, and our neighbors – who could be described as "salt of the earth" Kansans – have created a large, close-knit family by adopting cross-racially. To my knowledge, they have decidedly not followed any of Carroll's suggestions, and I would be surprised if they made any cultural accommodations besides bringing their children up with their Catholic views and a strong work ethic. Race, as a concept involved in their family structure, would never have entered their thinking.

As I read Carroll's editorial, though, I found yet another example of how race, especially in the United States, involves, subsumes, and penetrates the lives of all people. White parental adopters, though, may not be aware of race or may have found ways to justify what they have done: instead of thinking in term of race, for example, they could point to their liberal good intentions or, as in the case of my neighbors, think in terms of religious faith. And, from Nicholas Zill's online article, "The Changing Face of Adoption in the United States," we can understand who most of these white adopters are: they are older and more financially secure than biological white parents. Yet, here in my realization, one in which social class and race become intersected, is where this most intimate of relationships – that of the family – becomes

submerged with race. I started to play this thought experiment: could I imagine a black couple adopting a white child? Though I am sure that this has happened, I've never heard of it before personally and never seen this type of family represented in popular media. Instead, this type of family creates a cultural dissonance because of the fact that it is so hard to imagine. But why? Where is this dissonance coming from?

This hard-to-imagine quality may point to systemic racism, in terms of a complex range of factors, such as economic factors (there are systemic reasons for why white couples will have more financial resources than those of black couples), institutional (there may be assumptions and expectations from adoption agencies regarding what types of people constitute "good" parents, and cultural (there are few representations in popular culture to allow us to make sense of these types of families). Carroll addresses systemic racism when she reminds white parents that the "beauty" and existential significance of their adopted black children do not stem from the white parents themselves; they, according to Carroll, do not bring the beauty and the worth to their children – that beauty and worth already pre-exists within them.

According to Zill, white potential adopters may be paying attention to these conversations about race and systemic racism: since 1999, white parents are adopting far fewer African-American children in favor of adopting children with Asian ethnicities.

A final way for me to make personal meaning out of Carroll's editorial is to recognize the power that Carroll endows upon parents. As far as Carroll is concerned, parents have the power to bestow identities, dispositions, attitudes, and ideas about self worth – and they can create all of this magical identity work through the ways they characterize their children in their language and informal conversations; the example that Carroll uses is "spitfire," which, when labelling a

young black woman, may conjure up stereotypes about “angry black women.” Carroll has extremely high expectations for the linguistic and ideological consciousness of parents, and maybe that’s her point: if you, as a white adopter of a black child, cannot serve this important role as a parent “naturally” – that is, you cannot fluently bring your children up in a diverse and multi-racial community – then you should reconsider becoming a parent in the first place. The risks are too high. Of course, Carroll may hold too much faith in the power of parents, who cannot possibly control the rich alchemy of biological, social, and cultural factors that influence their children’s identities, interests, and influences.

After all, hasn’t Carroll demonstrated the lack of power of parents in the overall identity formation of their children? Carroll has been able to write this highly intimate criticism of her own white parents because of her “adoption” of new communities, concepts, and ways of speaking and writing.

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Workshop & Criteria

In the following tables, you will find the qualities that constitute three different performance levels of a reading reflection:

Expos Criteria	Your Reading Reflection Exceeds the Assignment Objectives
Purpose/Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accurately and fairly summarizes the reading in a way that is meaningful for readers. Articulates a reflective thesis that demonstrates your ability to understand, reflect on, and relate to the reading.
Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops your main ideas and satisfies your readers; uses sub-points, explanations, secondary research, examples, personal anecdotes, and other forms of support.
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizes your ideas in ways that are helpful and clear for your readers; your readers can easily differentiate your main points from your support within paragraphs; you guide your readers throughout the reflection (e.g., by using transitions and readerly cues) and through each paragraph by marking the connections between sentences and ideas.
Tone/Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows your openness, objectivity, fairness, and flexibility through your tone; style choices engage the reader and help make your ideas sticky.
Editing/Proofreading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates careful and consistent attention to formatting and accuracy.

Expos Criteria	Your Reading Reflection Meets the Assignment Objectives
Purpose/Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarizes the basic gist of the reading, though not comprehensively or always accurately; the summary may not match your purpose. Includes a reflective thesis, but it may be too general and may not remain consistent in its reflective purpose; at times, you may be responding to the issue, not reflecting on it.
Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops your main ideas, but readers may expect more reflection and connections to other ideas, examples, personal anecdotes, and secondary sources.
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizes your ideas but does so minimally and generically; readers may not always be able to differentiate your main ideas from your support.
Tone/Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows an attempt at fairness, though your tone may not be consistent or appropriate.

Editing/Proofreading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates some attention to formatting and accuracy, though not consistently; readers may have to hesitate at times due to minor errors, although they do not have significant problems understanding your reflection.
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Expos Criteria	Your Reading Does Not Meet the Assignment Objectives
Purpose/Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fails to summarize the reading accurately and fairly; the summary will not be useful for readers and does not meet the purposes of your reflection. Fails to include a thesis statement, or the main point may not meet the reflective purpose and may resemble a “rant” or an argument showing your opinions about the issue of the reading.
Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fails to develop the reflection through the use of explanation, examples, secondary research, and personal anecdotes; your discussion is not helpful and meaningful for your readers.
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fails to organize the reflection adequately for readers; readers will not be able to differentiate main ideas from supporting points; might not use paragraphing, transitions, and other strategies to guide readers.
Tone/Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fails to demonstrate balance and fairness; you may come across as overly glowing or angry and disrespectful.
Editing/Proofreading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fails to show care and attention to formatting and accuracy; readers will struggle to make meaning out of your writing.

Workshop Writers: After reading through these different descriptions of the criteria and these three different levels of reading reflection performances, pose for yourself and your workshop partners 2-3 questions or concerns that you have with how you have met the purpose/focus, development, organizational, and tonal qualities of the reading reflection.

Workshop Readers: Read your workshop partners’ questions or concerns and keep in mind these overall criteria. While you are reading, comment in the margins of your partners’ drafts, making sure to do the following:

- Include at least **two** comments, positive notes, revision suggestions, or questions that ask your partners to consider their **purpose/focus**; after these types of comments, write “purpose/focus” in parentheses.
- Include at least **two** comments, positive notes, revision suggestions, or questions that ask your partners to consider their **development**; after these types of comments, write “development” in parentheses.
- Include at least **one** comment, positive notes, revision suggestion, or question that asks your partners to consider their **organization**; after these types of comments, write “organization” in parentheses.

- Include at least **one** comment, positive note, revision suggestion, or question that asks your partners to consider their **tone/style**; after these types of comments, write “tone/style” in parentheses.

Student Example

“Get Up, Stand Up -- Stand Up For Your Life”

Taylir Charest

Taylir Charest wrote this Reading Reflection in Spencer Young’s ENGL 100. Charest wrote her reflection on Chet Ellis’s “The Sound of Silence.”

We all face small, everyday transgressions by others in one way or another. Most people endure comments or jokes about their race, age, weight, or gender each day. Do we perpetuate the discrimination because we do not initiate a change by standing up against those everyday transgressions? Chet Ellis believes we do.

In “The Sound of Silence” by Chet Ellis, he writes about his middle- and high-school experience where he learns that by not speaking out against racial microaggressions early, he lets offenders think what they are doing and saying is okay, and the microaggressions only get worse. In hindsight, Ellis does not blame himself for being racially targeted, but he does blame himself for not standing up against others. In his hometown of Westport, Connecticut, he was one of the only Black people, leaving him feeling like he stuck out like a sore thumb. In middle school, “I’m blacker than you,” was a remark from his classmates because he had not listened to Lil Wayne’s album that had just dropped. Ellis let it go, which was one of his first mistakes. Not wanting others to feel like he did when people made jokes that offended him, he would smile or simply change the subject. This response made microaggressions worse for him in high school. Freshman year during soccer season, his teammates used to play “get the minority,” where they chased him down, so they could tackle him. These were not the only instances when microaggressions occurred. After doing some research on why it was difficult for him to stand up for himself, Ellis questioned if it was his fault the jokes got so bad, and if he had stood up for himself sooner, would the jokes have stopped? Following this, Ellis took accountability for not speaking out.

Reading this article for the first time, I immediately found myself being able to relate to Ellis and his experiences. This does not mean I understand what it feels like to experience racism. Though I have not experienced racial microaggressions, I parallel his experience with mine being a woman. I will now show three examples of how Ellis’s remarks hit home for me. For

instance, when the microaggressions got too much to handle and he did some research on why it was so hard to stand up for himself, he found a meaningful article and quoted it in his paper. It said “For token women, the price of being one of the boys is a willingness to turn, occasionally, against the girls. The token woman, in other words, is required to sell out her own kind.” And Ellis questions, “Had I sold out my own race in an effort to fit in?” A token woman is included in a group to make others believe the group is being fair and inclusive, when this is not really true (“A Token Woman”). Ellis felt some of the same things a token woman does. Though I do not quite feel exactly like a token woman, I can relate to this because I have many friends who are young men, and I am often referred to as “one of the boys” when I am with them. They are who I have always hung around. Being in this situation, sometimes I did find myself selling out my own gender, putting myself and other women down, just to fit in with them.

Another time I found myself relating to Ellis was when he talked about a really bad “joke” that his classmates made, and he only reacted with a smile. Ellis said, “He had offended me to my core, and yet there I was feeling compelled to smile so as to not offend him.” For me, this happens quite often, just as it did to Ellis. If one of the guys is making a joke, I am probably going to laugh at it, no matter how bad it is. I might not laugh at as many things as I used to, but I never wanted to stand up against the joker and make him feel like he was not funny. I always found myself smiling and laughing along because I did not want the boys to feel how I felt. The misogyny that laced their jokes was offensive and got to be too much sometimes. They even recognized their offensiveness at times, but then joked about being really misogynistic with their humor. I wondered if they said some of the same things about me that they said about other girls when I was not around. Trying to be so relatable for them really took a toll on me. This is how I think Ellis felt when he was reacting the same way. He did not want to make someone else feel bad, even though others at his school were making some of the most insensitive jokes I have ever heard. It was continuous acts of misogyny without consequences from me, and continuous acts of racism without consequences from Ellis.

The last example I found myself relating to is when Ellis gave us some background on himself at the beginning of his paper and said, “I covered myself in rags from J. Crew and Vineyard Vines as camouflage, trying to show the people around me that I belonged.” He wore overpriced shirts, in my opinion, just to try and blend in with everyone around him. This action pertains to me, but almost in the opposite way, as I am not the type of young woman to wear “nice” or fancy clothes. You will see me in athletic shorts or leggings and a big T-shirt most days. I like being comfortable and do not like to stand out. When I do dress in something other than my normal, people comment on it, and it makes me uncomfortable. Women have to confine themselves to fit society's standards, while men can wear almost anything they want without being chastised. When women wear anything that shows off their figures, they are automatically sexualized. This is why I wear the clothes that I do. Ellis used brand name clothes as a way to fit in, just as I do with unrevealing clothing.

Overall, “The Sound of Silence” helped me realize that “letting it happen” is not the way to approach things. This essay was influential and relevant for me because it helped me realize that something similar is going on in my life, and it showed me how I can change to make it

better. When people are being offensive towards you, actually standing up for yourself can stop these offensive jokes and comments in the future, and it may even get people to stand up with you. I hope this article urges others to see that staying silent is not the solution, whereas speaking up for yourself and others is.

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Chapter 3

Exploratory Essay



Exploratory Essay Assignment Guidelines

As its name implies, the Exploratory Essay allows you to explore a complex issue to not only better understand the issue itself but also to inform your readers and better situate yourself as a critical thinker within the cultural conversation. Because of its investigative nature, the Exploratory Essay's purpose is informative and its tone is neutral and invitational, allowing you to build on the skills you developed in the Reading Reflection (Chapter 2).

What will you do?

For this assignment, you will write a 1,000–1,200-word (4–5 double-spaced pages) essay that explores a sociocultural issue related to socioeconomic status or social class from multiple points of view. You will read several articles together with your classmates to better understand the scope and complexity of the conversations around social class in the United States; you will also supplement these sources with independent outside research. Your independent research should help you identify a topical focus that will serve as the thematic frame for your own exploratory essay. Additionally, because the essay is designed to help readers understand the conversation around your topic, your essay must include **at least three sources**.

To explore a sociocultural issue from multiple viewpoints, you should read a variety of sources, such as newspaper articles, editorials, and policy reports. These are not meant to be models of exploratory writing. Their purpose is to provide some of the core knowledge that will help you to contextualize this issue in your own essay. As you read, keep in mind the purpose of your writing: you are not arguing in favor of or against a particular stance; you are not attempting to prove which authors are right or wrong; instead, you are respectfully engaging with all authors' ideas to present a neutral overview of the conversations happening around your topic.

To put it another way, keep the idea of an invitation in mind. When we send an invitation (to a party or a wedding), we are letting recipients know that they are welcome to attend, but they are in no way required to come—they can accept or decline as they see fit. Think of this paper in a similar way: you are inviting your audience to look at the different facets of an issue, but you are not requiring them to agree or disagree with any of them. They may consider what you say and form their own opinion; you are not trying to persuade them to accept a certain position. You do want them to engage seriously with your writing, though, and we will talk about strategies to help you do so without falling into argumentative or persuasive language.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of writing an Exploratory Essay is how the invitation you will extend to others extends to you, too: in the same way that you are inviting your audience to consider different perspectives, you also are inviting yourself to explore these same perspectives.

Who is your target audience?

While your instructor ultimately will assess your success in respectfully engaging the larger conversation on your topic and consistently maintaining an invitational tone, you should imagine your target audience as a reader who may have a partial, or even firmly narrow, view about the issue. Your reader might come from a different background, might have different knowledge, and/or might have experienced the world differently than the authors with whom you engage. Remember that your goal is not to convince your reader that they are wrong (or right); instead, you are inviting them to understand the many facets of the issue.

Objectives

By the end of this assignment, you should be able to do the following:

- Demonstrate your ability to respectfully examine a complex issue from multiple perspectives
- Maintain a neutral, invitational tone
- Show that you understand and respect the perspectives of others
- Objectively and accurately summarize writers' main points
- Organize sources thematically to inform an audience about a larger conversation
- Synthesize sources in terms of their common and diverging points
- Effectively integrate outside sources into your essay
- Effectively and purposefully organize your ideas to convey a clear topic focus in your writing

Rationale

An exploratory essay invites you to imagine, understand, and engage diverse perspectives — an important aspect of critical thinking and global citizenship, as reflected in Kansas State University's Undergraduate Student Learning Outcomes and its Principles of Community. Such an assignment also asks you to think through how issues such as gender, race, and class impact your life in the academy and within the larger social realm. In fact, part of being an engaged student and citizen is a willingness and ability to consider not only your own perspective but also the perspectives of others. This assignment will help prepare you to consider and articulate these multiple viewpoints or angles of vision; it also will prepare you to analyze a written text and to put that text in conversation with other texts. Such analytical skills will prove crucial throughout your college career and will serve you well throughout your life.

You will also encounter “exploratory writing” in many of your classes. If you are a student in the sciences or social sciences, your professors are likely to assign a similar essay called a Review of Literature or Literature Review. This type of essay shares the informative goal of the Exploratory Essay in its quest to capture the state of research on a topic at a given point in time. Academic researchers use Literature Reviews to ground their own research projects, while professional readers might use them to stay in touch with current events in their field.

If you are a biology major, for example, you might be asked to write a Literature Review about the rise of antibiotic resistant microbes; if you’re a health and nutrition major, your topic could be diet trends such as “paleo”; and, if you’re an education major, you could work with a topic like special education inclusion models. The paper you would write, then, would not be based on your personal experience or interpretation, but instead be based on the objective presentation of data, theories, and other research material. Finally, similar to the Exploratory Essay, though the paper’s topic might be framed as a problem, the Literature Review is not solution-oriented or argumentative in nature.

In short, the Exploratory Essay is a typical academic essay, one that will help you in your academic career.



Considering Social Class

Socioeconomic Class in the U.S.

In the United States, socioeconomic class can be surprisingly hard to talk about. Part of this resistance is likely tied to the investment in American individuality and the “American Dream.” Within these concepts, anyone can succeed if they work hard enough. Additionally, many middle- and upper-class Americans were raised to believe that it’s impolite to talk about issues of money and income. In Great Britain, on the other hand, social class is much more obvious. Social class determines the dialect, the words one uses (e.g., what upper-class folks call a “sofa,” working-class people call a “couch”), eating times for lunch and dinner, and even the way one makes a cup of tea. In the United States, however, class involves cultural distinctions that can be more subtle and harder to classify. Social class identity may also blend with regional

identity, and it may be difficult to untangle working-class culture from rural, Midwestern, or Southern identities.

What complicates social class even more is that it is not directly or solely correlated with income levels, although income levels certainly impact class. In a series of articles about social class, *The New York Times* defines class as a status system involving such variables as occupation, education, income, and wealth.¹ Some also include patterns of consumption, recreation habits, language, taste – both aesthetic and culinary – and etiquette. In other words, social class is tied to the subjective perception of behaviors, dispositions, and refinement, as well as simple income. Additionally, the kind or source of income impacts social class. You might have heard the term “old money,” or “passive income,” for example, indicating that a person’s family simply “has” wealth or simply “is” wealthy. All these variables (often the “socio” part of “socioeconomic class”) help determine an individual’s status in society and influence how we judge others.

As you can already see, socioeconomic class (or social class, or sometimes just “class”) is a complicated topic. It’s made more complicated by the fact that scholars still don’t really agree on just what class is or which term or terms most aptly describe what it is we’re talking about. For example, most of us have probably heard of a three-tiered class system in which people are sorted into the upper, middle, or lower (or sometimes “working”) class. Such a system likely dates back to 19th century cultural critic Matthew Arnold’s categorizations of class. These three categories are often now broken down further into five: upper, upper- middle, middle, lower-middle, and lower.²

Activity

Below, you’ll find a 2008 table that employs these categories in an American context. What’s important to note is that these data are based on participants who defined themselves as “middle-class.”

While you look at these data, consider these following questions:

¹ These articles are available at www.nytimes.com/pages/national/class/index.html.

² Fussell, Paul. *Class: A Guide Through the American Status System*. Touchstone, 1983. p. 27.

- What take-away points can you make about how different groups of people represent themselves as “middle-class”?
- How might these responses have changed since 2008?
- What surprises you about these responses? (What might you want to explore some more in this chapter?)

The Middle Classes: Who Makes Up Each Group				
	Top of the Class	Satisfied Middle	Anxious Middle	Struggling Middle
Gender	%	%	%	%
Male	56	45	49	37
Female	44	55	51	63
Race/Ethnicity				
White, non-Hispanic	79	75	73	56
Black, non-Hispanic	10	7	10	20
Hispanic	6	12	11	19
Other	5	6	6	5
Age				
18-29	16	31	13	35
30-49	46	19	59	32
50-64	30	16	26	18
65+	8	34	3	15
Education				
College or more	41	15	30	8
Some college	29	29	30	16
High school or less	30	56	40	76
Family Income				
\$100,000 or more	32		14	
\$50,000-&99,000	68	1	62	
\$30,000-\$49,000		60	24	19
\$20,000-\$29,000		23		23
\$20,000 or less		16		58
Marital Status				
Married	69	37	67	22
Not married	31	62	32	77
Quality of Present Life				
High	46	41	16	24
Medium	42	36	43	27
Low	12	23	40	47
Will Children Have Better Life Than You?				
Better	49	63	44	58
Worse	17	12	28	16

Same	24	17	20	18
No Children	6	3	6	4

Figure 1. Attitudes & Demographics about Middle Class Identity in the United States, Pew Research Center.³

Activity

Here are two more recent examples to help us make sense of these categorizations. In the first, Kansas writer Sarah Smarsh describes her experience as a first-generation college student. The second is an excerpt from journalist Sarah Sugar's (*Vox*) interview with author and University of Michigan lecturer, S. Margot Finn, over Finn's 2017 book, *Discriminating Taste: How Class Anxiety Created the American Food Revolution*.

Sarah Smarsh: Even at a Midwestern state university, my background – agricultural work, manual labor, rural poverty, teen pregnancies, domestic chaos, pervasive addiction – seemed like a faraway story to the people I met. Most of them were from tidy neighborhoods in Wichita, Kansas City, the greater Chicago area. They used a different sort of English and had different politics. They were appalled that I had grown up with conservative ideas about government and Catholic doctrine against abortion. I was appalled that they didn't know where their food came from or even seem to care since it had always just appeared on their plates when they wanted it.⁴

Sarah Sugar: You talk about one of the failures of the food revolution being the way it's "helped stigmatize the foods and bodies associated with the poor," while convincing middle- and upper-middle classes that their dietary choices mean they "deserve" their status. In the book, you say that trying to get other people to eat "higher quality" foods is a kind of bigotry, because it feeds into "pernicious social divides." But at the same

³ Morin, Rich. "America's Four Middle Classes." *Pew Research Center Social & Demographic Trends*, Pew Research Center, 29 July 2008. *Pew Research Center*, www.pewsocialtrends.org/2008/07/29/americas-four-middle-classes/.

⁴ Smarsh, Sarah. *Heartland*. Scribner, 2018.

time, aren't there reasons — environmental reasons, health reasons — you might want to try to get people to change their behavior?⁵

Smarsh begins her paragraph with a list of class descriptors — “agricultural work, manual labor, rural poverty, teen pregnancies, domestic chaos, pervasive addiction.” In what ways are we to understand how these are in tension with the “tidy neighborhoods” in the more urban places of “Wichita, Kansas City, [and] the greater Chicago area?” What class is she describing? Do your own experiences lead you to agree or disagree with her observations?

Similarly, what clues does Sugar's interview questions provide about social class and culinary tastes? What other examples can you think of to explore this topic (i.e., think about “Lunchables” and charcuterie boards, American cheese, and the size of your grocery store's cheese selection)?



The American Dream: Social Mobility

Some might wonder why we worry about socioeconomic class at all. After all, it doesn't matter what class one is born into; if you work hard, you can be successful and change your social class, right? This is what we call a classic “bootstrap narrative,” popularized by authors such as Horatio Alger. The phrase now refers to a person who improves his or her station with individual hard work (interestingly, it seems the phrase originally was meant to refer to something impossible—one cannot, after all, actually pull oneself up by one's own bootstraps). In terms of socioeconomic class, it refers to the ability to improve one's social class through hard work and perseverance. This is commonly referred to as economic mobility.

Scholars are somewhat divided on this topic, but most research suggests that it is actually very difficult to move up the socioeconomic ladder. That isn't to say that children make the same

⁵ Sugar, Rachel. “‘Good Taste’ is All About Class Anxiety.” *Vox*, 26 Sept. 2019, <https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2019/9/26/20873938/good-taste-class-anxiety-s-margot-finn>.

amount of money as their parents—as we’ll see, they often do—but it is rare for people to actually move into a different level of socioeconomic status than that of their parents. Additionally, because social class is marked by more than simply income, some research shows that it is nearly statistically impossible to move from one social class level to the next. Professor of Economics Gregory Clark cautions that focusing solely on changes in one factor (such as income, occupation, or education) allows us “to confuse the random fluctuations of income across generations, influenced by such things as career choices between business and philosophy, with true generalized social mobility.”⁶ Instead, Clark believes we need to look across generations, analyzing larger trends as well as the variety of factors that play a role in social class. As a result of his intergenerational study of social mobility in Sweden, Clark found that when we take a variety of factors into consideration—income, occupation, education, etc.—we find that there is almost no change in social status. If your family was middle class in the 18th century, they are statistically likely to be middle class in the 19th, 20th, and 21st century. While income levels fluctuate more in the United States than they do in Sweden, Clark argues that his study shows how single-factor or single-generational studies within the U.S. overinflate the possibility of sustained social mobility.⁷

Let’s take a moment to consider the implications of Clark’s findings. In short, Clark found that while individuals might move between social classes across time and generations—the daughter of a mechanic with a high school diploma might become a neurosurgeon, thereby moving up the ladder of social class in education, occupational status, income, and wealth—it is statistically much more likely that the future generations of this same family will fall within the working class than the upper-middle class. Structurally, then, while there will be individual cases of members of the upper class moving down the social ladder (due to such things as stock market crashes, for example) and individual cases of members of the lower or working class moving up the ladder, across generations—across hundreds of years, in fact—most members within a family line will maintain the same class status as their ancestors. If this is true, and much recent research implies that it is, then we must grapple with the fact that sheer individual hard work is rarely enough for most people or families to break class barriers, at least not for a sustained period of time.

How Americans think about social mobility changes over time as well. According to a 2014 article using survey results from 2009, “When the Pew Economic Mobility Project conducted a

⁶ Clark, Gregory. “Low Mobility Associated with Inherited Ability is No Social Tragedy.” *Free Exchange: Economics*, 13 Feb. 2013. *The Economist*, www.economist.com/blogs/freeexchange/2013/02/mobility-2.

⁷ Clark, Gregory. “What is the True Rate of Social Mobility in Sweden? A Surname Analysis 1700- 2012.” Gregory Clark: Professor of Economics. “Economics: Faculty,” UC Davis, faculty.econ.ucdavis.edu/faculty/gclark/papers/Sweden%202012%20AUG.pdf.

survey in 2009—hardly a high point in the history of American capitalism—39 percent of respondents said they believed it was ‘common’ for people born into poverty to become rich, and 71 percent said that personal attributes like hard work and drive, not the circumstances of a person’s birth, are the key determinants of success.”⁸

These attitudes about the “American Dream” may be shifting. Compare the results from the 2009 survey to Pew Research Center’s 2020 survey results about the same question. Note how the responses differ more sharply based upon the political affiliation of the respondent.

In your opinion, which generally has more do with...				
	Why a person is rich?		Why a person is poor?	
	They have had more advantages in life than most other people.	They have worked harder than most other people.	They have faced more obstacles in life than most other people.	They have not worked as hard as most other people.
Total	65%	33%	71%	26%
Republican or Rep-leaning	45%	53%	55%	42%
Democrat or Dem-leaning	82%	16%	86%	12%

Figure 2. Attitudes about Social Mobility in the United States, PEW Research Center⁹

Social Mobility & Race

Recently, the non-partisan research group based out of Harvard, Opportunity Insights, published a report summarizing its findings of 2018 Census data as they related specifically to questions of race and social mobility:¹⁰

Finding #1: Hispanic Americans are moving up in the income distribution across generations, while Black Americans and American Indians are not.

⁸ Swansburg, John. “The Self-Made Man: The Story of America’s Most Pliable, Pernicious, Irrepressible Myth.” *Slate*, 29 Sept. 2014, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/history/2014/09/the_self_made_man_history_of_a_myth_from_ben_franklin_to_andrew_carnegie.html.

⁹ Pew Research Center. “Most Americans Point to Circumstances, Not Work Ethic, for Why People Are Rich or Poor.” 2 March 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/03/02/most-americans-point-to-circumstances-not-work-ethic-as-reasons-people-are-rich-or-poor/>.

¹⁰ Chetty, Raj, et.al. “Race and Economic Opportunity in the United States,” Non-technical summary pdf, *Opportunity Insights*, May 2020, <https://opportunityinsights.org/paper-category/race/>.

Finding #2: The black-white income gap is entirely driven by differences in men's, not women's, outcomes.

Finding #3: Differences in family characteristics — parental marriage rates, education, wealth — and differences in ability explain very little of the black-white gap.

Finding #4: In 99% of neighborhoods in the United States, black boys earn less in adulthood than white boys who grow up in families with comparable income.

Finding #5: Both black and white boys have better outcomes in low-poverty areas, but black-white gaps are bigger in such neighborhoods.

Finding #6: Within low-poverty areas, black-white gaps are smallest in places with low levels of racial bias among whites and high rates of father presence among blacks.

Finding #7: The black-white gap is not immutable: black boys who move to more affluent neighborhoods as children have significantly better outcomes.

Here are some additional findings to broaden our understanding of the relationship between social mobility and race or ethnicity in the U.S.:

- “Black Americans and American Indians have much lower rates of upward mobility and higher rates of downward mobility than whites, leading to persistent disparities across generations.”¹¹
- “Today, income inequality in the U.S. is greatest among Asians [Asian Americans]. From 1970 to 2016, the gap in the standard of living between Asians near the top and the bottom of the income ladder nearly doubled, and the distribution of income among Asians transformed from being one of the most equal to being the most unequal among America's major racial and ethnic groups.”¹²

¹¹ Chetty, Raj, et al. “Race and Economic Opportunity in the United States: An Intergenerational Perspective.” Abstract. *United States Census Bureau*, Sept. 2018, <https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2018/adrm/CES-WP-18-40R.html>.

¹² Cilluffo, Anthony and Rakesh Kochhar. “Income Inequality in the U.S. Is Rising Most Rapidly Among Asians.” *Pew Research Center*, July 12, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2018/07/12/income-inequality-in-the-u-s-is-rising-most-rapidly-among-asians/>.

Note: While this chapter is primarily about socioeconomic class, other identity factors such as race, class, region, ethnicity, and able-bodiedness impact social class. We call this “intersectionality,” a useful concept to help us better understand and explain social mobility discrepancies between demographic groups in this country. You might find this approach helpful as you decide the thematic focus of your Exploratory Essay.

Social Mobility & Education

This is not to say that hard work and perseverance never pay off. Of course, they can, and as a student in college, you are expected to work hard, to study, to take your education seriously. Why? In part, because it will result in better grades than if you had simply blown off all your exams, essays, assignments, and responsibilities. But there is also a longer chain of effects: better grades can result in scholarships, which might result in your ability to work fewer hours to pay for college, which can result in more time to study and more time to sleep so that you’re not falling asleep while studying. This can then result in, again, high marks, maintained scholarships, maintained time to study and sleep. Additionally, it means you can list academic scholarships on your resume, as well as graduating summa cum laude. Such accomplishments can make you more competitive when applying for jobs, and your perceived investment in your education can result in stronger letters of recommendations from professors. In this way, hard work and education can help you get a good job, can help you make a decent wage, and can help you shift those *New York Times* scales higher on the education, occupation, income, and wealth categories. You might then find yourself making more money than your parents, having a level of education equal to or higher than your parents, and perhaps owning a nicer car or home than your parents.

In fact, according to a 2012 PEW report on social mobility, researchers found that “a four-year college degree” promotes upward mobility from the bottom and prevents downward mobility from the middle and top.

In other words, a college degree makes it easier to move up the socioeconomic ladder and harder to fall down it. More specifically, researchers found:

- Almost one-half (47%) of those raised in the bottom quintile of the family income ladder who do not earn a college degree are stuck there as adults, compared with 10% who do earn a college degree. Similarly, 45% without a college degree are stuck in the bottom of the family wealth ladder compared with 20% with a degree.
- Having a college degree makes a person more than three times more likely to rise from the bottom of the family income ladder all the way to the top and makes a person more

than four times more likely to rise from the bottom of the family wealth ladder to the top.

- 39% raised in the middle of the family income ladder who do not get a college degree fall from the middle, compared with less than a quarter (22%) of those with a degree. Similarly, 39% raised in the middle of the family wealth ladder who do not earn a degree fall down the wealth ladder, compared with 19% with a degree.



An Extended Example: Liam & Jason

A college degree, then, makes social mobility easier, but how does familial social class impact education and future success? To get a sense of the possible effects of social class, imagine two high school students who are, by most visible markers, pretty similar. Liam and Jason live in the same town and attend the same high school. They have the same IQ, both are hardworking, and both plan to attend college. But Jason's parents would be categorized as upper middle class, while Liam's are working class. Both Jason and Liam grew up seeing at least one of their parents read the newspaper before heading off to work, but Jason's parents had a bit freer time in the evening and would often watch the national news and read books about politics, education, and history, in addition to some of the great classic novels. Jason was encouraged to do the same, and such books were readily available to him. Additionally, because his parents had the time to keep up with national and world events, Jason and his parents often talked about politics and history at the dinner table. Jason quickly learned the vocabulary, the concepts, and the ways to structure a persuasive argument as he listened to his parents and participated in their discussions.

Liam's parents were also interested in world and national events, but his dad worked the night shift and wasn't around for dinner. His mom often worked two jobs and tended to be too tired for serious conversation or leisure reading when she got home. Liam spent a good amount of his time helping around the house—making meals for himself and his parents, doing the dishes, doing laundry. In other words, despite levels of interest or education, there was simply little time for heavy reading and spirited dinner conversation about that night's news. Because his parents didn't have much time for reading, there weren't a lot of books in the house for Liam to pick up out of curiosity.

As Liam and Jason entered high school, Jason found he had already read quite a few of the required novels, so those classes were relatively easy for him. Liam, on the other hand, had never encountered the kinds of language he was seeing in books by Jane Austen and Nathaniel Hawthorne, so he struggled a bit—not for lack of intelligence, but for lack of experience. Additionally, by his sophomore year Liam was working a part-time job to help pay the bills and to try to save for college, so he didn't have as much time to devote to homework as he'd like. Because most of those books were familiar for Jason, though, he found himself in Advanced Placement classes in both English and History.

By the time Liam and Jason graduated high school, Jason had taken the AP exam in English and History, earning him college credit for the introductory courses in both subjects. His teachers thought of him as bright, dedicated, and college bound. Liam had done well in most of his classes and his teachers liked him quite a bit, but they noticed that he hadn't always completed all of the assignments or the reading. Jason was better prepared for the ACT exam, having read more of the expected literature and history, so he scored higher than Liam. All these factors impacted which colleges would accept each student.

Let's imagine that both Jason and Liam get into college, but based on his ACT scores, his GPA, and a call from one of his high school teachers who happens to be an alumnus, Jason is accepted to an Ivy League school. Proud of his success, Jason's parents buy him a car. Liam doesn't even apply to Ivy League colleges but is quite happy to be able to attend the local state school. Granted, he's not quite sure how he's going to pay for it. Based on his parents' income, he qualifies for financial aid, but not enough to cover all the costs, and his parents can't afford to help out. So, Liam gets a part time job to help cover the expense and he takes out two school loans. Because his parents make more money than Liam's, Jason only gets a little bit of financial aid, but his grades and ACT scores qualify him for an academic scholarship. His parents can cover the remainder of the cost. As you might imagine, Jason and Liam have similar experiences in college as they did in high school—Jason has more time to study and sleep because he's not working to help pay the bills. Liam does relatively well, but, again, he never quite finished all

those books in high school because he was working part time and just couldn't find enough time to study, so he feels a little behind before he even gets to campus.

When the two men graduate, Jason has a degree from an Ivy League school—itsself not enough to guarantee a job, but it puts Jason's job application on the top of most piles. Jason leaves school with a car that he didn't have to pay for, no college loans, and a degree from a nationally respected school. Liam graduates with the same degree, albeit from a less respected college, but he has car payments and now school loans to pay off. In other words, Liam starts off his post-graduate career in some steep debt with which his parents can't help.

At this point, even if Jason and Liam get similar jobs, Jason will likely be able to buy a better car, nicer clothing, and a bigger house, simply because he is not also trying to pay off a car loan as well as school loans.

All of Jason's income can go toward savings or purchases, whereas a good portion of Liam's must go toward debt. Jason's credit is likely better as a result, too, and he'll have an easier time qualifying for a home mortgage. Additionally, Jason's parents can help with a down payment on a house if necessary, making Jason's monthly mortgage payments lower. Not so with Liam. Even if Jason and Liam start out making the same monthly salary, Jason's paycheck will simply go further, as he doesn't have to make monthly payments on his school loans.

Did Jason work harder than Liam? No. He worked differently, as he could study more, sleep more, maybe even travel more with his family and see other perspectives on the world. Liam worked just as hard, but part of that time was spent at a part time job. Additionally, Liam wasn't as practiced in what one might call scholarly debates—that's not how his mealtimes were spent—nor did he grow up reading classic literature and discussing it with his parents. Such benefits *might* be the result of Jason's parents working harder (or at least working at higher-paying jobs) and earning more money than Liam's, but, as we see from the example of Jason and Liam themselves, it's not simply about how hard one works, but also about the often-unseen benefits that come from being in a higher socioeconomic class. Jason wasn't handed his high school or college degree—far from it—but the amount of time that he could devote to school coupled with the economic benefits of not accruing student debt simply put him further ahead of Liam in ways he might not have even noticed.

Granted, many of you might be thinking that money doesn't buy happiness. Jason might be miserable and Liam might be happy. Absolutely. But let's also keep in mind the added stress that Liam has each month when he has to not only pay the same bills Jason has, but also his student loan and his car payment. This also means that he has less of his paycheck to spend

going out with his colleagues and making valuable business connections, buying groceries, and maintaining his car. All these aspects can also impact how much money Liam can put away for his own children's education.

Simply being in a higher socioeconomic class doesn't guarantee happiness, nor does it guarantee success, but what we hope this story shows are the real-life impacts of class status. Jason and Liam aren't real of course—they're hypothetical characters designed to make a point. Except that they are real, as these are the experiences of actual people in this country. They are, in fact, your experiences, as each of us is born into a socioeconomic class and there are real-life implications of that placement, a placement that you had no control over.



Reading Strategies

Research

For this assignment, you need at least three appropriate and credible secondary (“outside”) sources. Check the credibility of your sources by asking the following questions:

1. Who is the author? If there's no stated author, what is the publishing organization? What potential biases might this author or organization have? How do you know? In what ways could those biases impact the text's conclusions?
2. Is the piece published in a reputable source? How do you know? (Note: Remember that anyone can publish something online. Because of this, it's better to find reputable news sources and professional sites. It's even better to find peer-reviewed scholarly journals or books.)
3. How recent is the source? If it was published thirty years ago, the source probably does not provide the best information on socioeconomic class in the U.S.

Your secondary sources need to be integral to your essay. Make sure that each secondary source fills an important role in your draft. What do you still not know about socioeconomic

class in the U.S.? What information would help you better place your experience within a larger context? What viewpoints do you feel you're still not familiar with? Be sure to keep an open mind as you research and be prepared to follow threads of the strongest sources by resisting the temptation to just use the first source you find, and/or to only relying upon sources compatible with your own point of view.

Remember, too, that the best research is not solely someone's discussion of personal experience on a personal blog. These types of sources, similar to Wikipedia, Facebook, Twitter, and other online or social media platforms, may be a good place to get started, but look for more authoritative and credible sources.

As a good starting point, go to K-State's library homepage and use the "Search It" box. Some useful key terms might be "socioeconomic class," "class status," and "social class." Remember that you'll need to read several articles to find at least three that are relevant and useful.

Don't forget that you need to cite all sources using both in-text citations in MLA, APA, or another system and a properly formatted Works Cited (MLA) or References (APA).

As you will likely be reading the secondary sources online, you must figure out a way to highlight and/or annotate texts, keep notes, capture important quotes, etc. An old-fashioned notebook and pencil/pen are always an option as is keeping a running Google or Word document. If you find yourself reading sources on your phone or tablet, you might find the "Notes" feature useful as well.

Reading for the Conversation

We stress the importance of good notetaking for this assignment because you are not simply responding to just one source; instead, you will be actively searching for a variety of sources to familiarize yourself with the many perspectives that make up an issue. Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein call this critical reading approach **reading for the conversation**: "Reading for the conversation is more rigorous and demanding than reading for what one author says. It asks that you determine not only what the author thinks, but how what the author thinks fits with what others think, and ultimately with what you yourself think."¹³

There is a strong relationship between your ability to read critically and your ability to write critically, which is one of the most important goals of this class and of your entire academic experience. We can't mature as writers without understanding that nothing happens in a vacuum: there is almost always an ongoing cultural conversation occurring for any topic you

¹³ Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say, I Say*. 5th ed. W. W. Norton, 2021.

can imagine. Consider your Snapchat stories, Twitter threads, Reddit lists, GroupMe messages, and TikTok trends – all examples of ongoing cultural conversations with multiple communicators, themselves possessing many experiences, values, priorities, examples, and themes.

When we read for the conversation, we read for these contextual clues, or behind-the-scenes reveals, just as much as we read to understand the text itself. According to Graff and Birkenstein, these three reading approaches will help you accomplish this goal:

- Read for Background
- Read for New Information
- Read for the Author’s Motivation

Read for Background – Authors may explicitly provide the context for their research, usually in the introduction. For example, authors refer to previous studies, articles, authors and theorists, and statistics to help situate their own work within the larger conversation. Other writers establish context by using phrases that indicate a “gap in knowledge” or a “lack of discussion” around their issue (Graff and Birkenstein 182).

Sometimes, however, writers are not explicit about the context for their work, and you might be led to think that their ideas exist in isolation; or, their work may be republished or reposted in different online forums where the original intent becomes less clear. In these cases, you must do some additional work to determine context by doing the following:

- Searching the text for clues related to time, place, and stakeholders (people, organizations, or institutions involved in the conversation) and asking yourself these questions:
 - How long has the conversation been going? Look for dates and words such as “historically” or “currently.” Is it a well established conversation (e.g., theories about evolution) or are they newly formed, incipient conversations (e.g., politicized conversations related to Critical Race Theory)?
 - What scale is the conversation at? Is it a local, regional, national, or global concern?
 - Who are the people impacted, either directly or indirectly, within the conversation?
 - Who are the main “experts” (authors, researchers, theorists, and other stakeholders) who lead the conversation?
 - What are the main theories, ideological positions, and methods that are used to frame this conversation?
- Tracking down and reading cited or referenced sources

- Conducting additional research to supplement the context

Read for New Information – This is a commonsense strategy for us because it relates to understanding the overall purpose and main points of a reading. You read for many purposes, such as to discover new research contributions and research results and to learn about and explore a favorite subject. You'll want to look for the ways in which authors and researchers separate themselves from the background and context – the previous context of the conversation that you explored in the Read for Background strategy. What is the new and unique contribution they are making? What is their main point? How is their main point or research findings different from those of previous writers? How are they different?

Depending upon the type of reading, authors will oftentimes signal these new contributions in the title of their text or in the abstract; they may state their new point in the introduction, which they then may emphasize and repeat at the beginning of new sections or in the conclusion.

Read for the Author's Motivation – When we talk about evaluating a writer's credibility and trustworthiness, we are in part talking about determining their motivation: why are they writing? Are they writing to inform readers as part of their job (i.e., journalists reporting current events or scientists publishing trial data) or to persuade readers to think or feel a certain way about a topic (i.e., editorial writers and political pundits)? Seeking to understand writers' motivations and what they themselves have to gain (or lose) in relation to their issue can help you trust them and also help you see the ways in which the overall conversation matters. You may also get insights into the ideological commitments or biases that motivate them and frame the ways in which they present information and form arguments.

Though these reading strategies are time consuming, you will find them rewarding when you begin drafting your essay.

Summarizing

Reminders

As you begin to find secondary sources or consider readings that your instructor provides, you'll want to make sure you have a strong grasp over them by finding main points and summarizing them. Recall your strategies from Chapter 2 and look at these following questions to get started:

1. In one sentence, how would you sum up the *main point* of the reading?

2. Next, note any important sub-claims. Sub-claims are smaller arguments made to support the main idea.
3. What evidence do the authors use to support their main claim? Do they provide a few convincing examples? Statistics? Write what you believe to be the *most* important points of evidence or support below.
4. What do the authors say such evidence shows? What does it do for their argument?
5. Do the authors provide any possible alternative interpretations of their examples? Do they include any important counterpoints to their argument? If so, what are they?

When you have a clear sense of the larger argument, you can start to structure your summary. A good summary, however, does not follow the same organization of the reading. In other words, you should *not* write down each point in the order that the authors listed them in their article. Good summaries do not follow an “and then” organization (i.e., “and then they said this, and then they said that”). Instead, good summaries are organized *hierarchically*; they generally list the most important points first, then supporting points, and only the most relevant examples and evidence.

You should also always write in present tense. You must also make it clear that you are summarizing the work of another author by first introducing the author and text, and then by using attributive tags and phrases (remembering that you should *never* refer to an author by first name alone):

- [The author’s last name] goes on to claim that...
- She provides an example...
- Garland concludes with...
- Mencimer argues for...



“Says” and “Does” Statements

You must also read to understand the text, of course. While preparing for your previous major assignments, you may have discovered how difficult it is to write an accurate, thorough summary if you only skimmed an article and jotted down a few remembered main ideas. Or, your memory could have been faulty, and you may not have completely understood the text. Such rushed reading might inadvertently lead you to plagiarize the author’s words in your notes.

To avoid such problems, we offer “says” and “does” statements as a useful strategy for summary writing. This method of analysis is borrowed from Kenneth Bruffee’s *A Short Course in Writing* and can be used to help you better understand something you are reading, plan your essay, and/or analyze your own writing.

“Says”

“Says” statements are just that. They answer the question: what is the paragraph saying? What is its main point? Boil down the meaning of the paragraph to its essence, its main idea, its “gist.” Do not simply paraphrase the paragraph. These “says” statements are more general than the original paragraphs, omitting specific details such as the author’s supporting details (sometimes called “particulars”). These statements should be no longer than one or two sentences. Occasionally, however, when summarizing a short paragraph (such as those in an editorial or news article), you may find that your “says” statement is longer than the original paragraph.

“Does”

“Does” statements answer the question: what is the paragraph doing? These statements are related to the paragraph’s *function* in the text as a whole, including how it’s related to the paragraphs around it. Does statements, then, do not include information on the *content* of the paragraph. For instance, a typical “does” statement might look like this: “Paragraph 1 introduces the topic and provides some background information.” These statements help you understand how the paragraph is structured, as well as how the writer is supporting (or failing to support) their points.

How “Says” and “Does” Statements Are Different

The major distinction between “says” and “does” is that “says” statements are directly related to a paragraph’s *meaning*, but “does” statements are related to a paragraph’s *function*. A “says” statement will relate to the topic of the article.

On the other hand, since “does” statements describe a paragraph’s function, they are not specifically related to the topic of the text being considered. In fact, if your “does” statement includes anything about the text’s subject, you need to try again. Instead of summarizing a paragraph’s point (as “says” statements do), “does” statements can be applied to other similar kinds of paragraphs in similar kinds of texts. The functions of a paragraph are categorizable, and you should be able to discover some of these possible functions from the following list. “Does” statements usually begin with verbs and verb phrases.

Here is a sampling of the terms useful for determining what a paragraph does:

introduces topic	provides background
explains a complex issue	provides an example in support of claim/subclaim
presents a subclaim	quotes an expert in support of claim/subclaim
provides a transition	summarizes an argument of the opposition
forecasts the structure of the essay	presents a claim
rebutts an argument of the opposition	provides a definition

Below, you will find an example of the “Says/Does” strategy using three paragraphs from the middle of Sarah Garland’s “When Class Became More Important to a Child’s Education Than Race”¹⁴:

¹⁴ Garland, Sarah. “When Class Became More Important to a Child’s Education Than Race,” *The Atlantic*, 28 Aug 2013, www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/08/when-class-became-more-important-to-a-childs-education-than-race/279064/.

<p>The country is far from fulfilling [Martin Luther] King's dream that race no longer limit children's opportunities, but how much income their parents earn is more and more influential. According to a 2011 research study by Stanford sociologist Sean Reardon, the test-score gap between the children of the poor (in the 10th percentile of income) and the children of the wealthy (in the 90th percentile) has expanded by as much as 40 percent and is now more than 50 percent larger than the black-white achievement gap—a reversal of the trend 50 years ago. Underprivileged children now languish at achievement levels that are close to four years behind their wealthy peers.</p> <p>These days, middle-class children are also falling further behind their affluent peers. The test-score gap between middle-income (the 50th percentile of income) and poor children has remained stagnant; it's the gap between the top earners and the rest that is growing rapidly. And though more poor and middle-income children are completing college these days, they can't keep up with the growth in college graduates among the wealthiest families. A 2012 study by Reardon also found that "more and more seats in highly selective schools have been occupied by students from high-income families."</p> <p>"Income has become a much stronger predictor of how well kids do in school," Reardon says. "Race is about as good a predictor as it was 30 years ago. It's more that income has gotten more important, not that race has gotten less important."</p>	<p>Says: There has been an increase in the achievement levels separating wealthy children from underprivileged children.</p> <p>Does: Refers to a powerful authority, Martin Luther King, and uses a sociology study.</p> <p>Says: Wealthy students are accelerating beyond their middle-class peers as well.</p> <p>Does: Extends the previous point and cites a study to support the point about wealthy students.</p> <p>Says: Income correlates directly with school achievement.</p> <p>Does: Uses a quotation from a sociologist.</p>
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Activity

Using the summary strategies that were described above, choose one of the secondary sources that you are considering for your Exploratory Essay and do the following:

1. Focus on what the author(s) said/argued and summarize their argument in approximately 250 words.
2. Using the same general organizational strategy, summarize the source in 100 words.
3. Now Tweet it: In 140 characters (characters, not words) or less, summarize the main claim.

Why summarize in so many different lengths? When you write your Exploratory Essay, you'll need to illustrate that you understand the primary texts you're putting into conversation. But that doesn't mean you simply drop a long summarizing paragraph into your essay. Instead, you'll need to think *rhetorically* about how to use summary information: how much you need to include in order to respond, and what points are most relevant to your purpose. Sometimes that might be a brief paragraph; other times, it might be a brief sentence or two.

Annotated Bibliographies

You can also develop your summary writing skills by creating an **annotated bibliography** for the sources you anticipate using in the essay. Annotated bibliographies are often assigned in conjunction with literature reviews because of their value in helping writers organize their research, start to internalize what they are reading, and better see the overlap and gaps among the content of the readings. Because the bibliographies are organized by citation style, you will not be left scrambling to put together the references page at the end of the writing process.

Here's an outline of how to complete an annotated bibliography for your own research.

1. Provide the citation of the secondary source
2. Provide an overview or summary of the source
3. Contribute a critical analysis of the source
4. State the usefulness of the source and/or its relationship to your own essay

You already know how to complete the first two steps – citation information and the objective summary itself – but the last two steps might be new. For the “critical analysis” step, you will assess the source’s credibility as well as attempt to situate the source within the larger context of the issue (much like the critical reading strategy we discussed in the previous section). Lastly, you will use the “statement of relevance” step to situate the source within the scope of *your* essay.

Example Annotated Bibliography

In this following example, the four major parts of an annotated bibliography have been showcased in different paragraphs so that you can clearly see how they serve different purposes:

Lisle, Deborah. *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

In Chapter 1, “Introduction: The Global Imaginary or Contemporary Travel Writing,” Deborah Lisle focuses her readers on one key question when it comes to contemporary travel writing: how do travel writers and commentators deal with the historical past of contemporary travel writing, which oftentimes involved crude, racist, and Orientalizing depictions of Africans, Asians, and others and showcased imperialist and colonialist strategies? According to Lisle, there are two key strategies: to reinforce a “colonial vision,” in which contemporary travel writers, such as Paul Theroux, still cling to the superiority of North Americans and Europeans (4); or, conversely, to use a “cosmopolitan vision,” in which travel writers try to project a more ethical stance when it comes to dealing with human difference.

Lisle’s argument is influential, as her book on contemporary travel writing was one of the first to examine the political potentials of travel writing published after 1975, and she provides a useful colonial/cosmopolitan binary to help future scholars confront the challenges of these texts.

For my attempts to analyze travel writing in Central Asia and China, Lisle’s introductory concepts will be a useful way to define the ethical purposes of many of the 21st century travelers. Although there are few travelers with an explicit “colonial vision” – there are many who claim that their travel is being conducted for ethical purposes and to show the cultural and social harmony that exists in a globalizing world. Like Lisle, I will need to examine closely the motivations of these travelers.



Choosing Your Issue & Focus

Follow the Research

There are two levels of focus to the Exploratory Essay: the issue itself, that falls under the broad umbrella topic of “socioeconomic status in the U.S.,” that you have chosen to pursue, and the thematic angle that emerges from your research. For example, you might have already decided that you’re interested in the broader category of education and its relationship to social class in the U.S. As you conduct research, then, you might read about student loan debt and its impact on millennial homeownership rates, about the “engagement gap” that hurts college admission rates for under privileged kids, or about the connections between affordable early childhood education and lifetime earning potential. All of these topics relate to the overall focus of education, but they don’t relate to each other in any clear and manageable way.

So, you would have to choose the angle that you find the most compelling, the most relevant, or the most unfamiliar – whatever criterion you prefer to apply for an assignment that you’ll be spending time with. Let’s say you decide to go with “engagement gap” because it’s not something you’d heard about before, and now you’d like to know more. Congratulations, you’ve then used the research process itself to help you find a more specific thematic angle!

Use Your Personal Interest & Experience

The Exploratory Essay is less interested in your personal experience than other types of essays, but that doesn’t mean that you can’t use that experience at all; in fact, identifying your personal interests in the huge topic of socioeconomic status in the U.S. will help you narrow your focus and choose a research area that will prove engaging for the time you’ll spend on the assignment.

Freewriting is a good way to reflect on your own experiences with social class. Please use the following questions to help guide your thoughts:

- What is your major? Why did you choose it? If you don't yet have a major, what subjects are you hoping to learn more about while at college? How do your major or academic interests relate to social class or socioeconomic status?
- What attitudes related to work and social class do you and your family members and friends hold? How are these attitudes different? How have they changed?
- Did you grow up in an urban, rural, suburban, or other type of setting? How did that place shape your attitudes towards work, wealth, and other similar concepts?
- In what ways do you think your future life and lifestyle will be different from that of your parents?
- How would you define your own social class? What is the "evidence" (i.e., facts about your life) what would help support this definition? (For example, a study about social class differentiated "upper class" families if they possessed such items as an unabridged dictionary or original art.)

Use Class Discussion

Talking about examples related to social status in the U.S. is another way to help identify areas of focus for the Exploratory Essay. For example, as a class or in small groups designed by your instructor, you might discuss these prompts:

What are some pop culture depictions of class in the U.S.? In what ways are audiences "in on the jokes" for comedic genres? How do they know who to root for and who to root against? How do these sociocultural messages about social class in the U.S. add to or challenge our understanding?

- Television, e.g., *Bob's Burgers* & *Everyone Hates Chris*
- Music, e.g., Hip Hop & Country
- Film, e.g., *Us* & *The Wolf of Wall Street*
- Literature: e.g., *The Great Gatsby* & *Crazy Rich Asians*
- Social Media: e.g., Influencer Culture & Side Hustle

You can also use the mind map below to make connections between your personal reflections (in the freewrite) and the examples you and your classmates came up with and discussed in the previous activity to determine a specific focus for your Exploratory Essay.

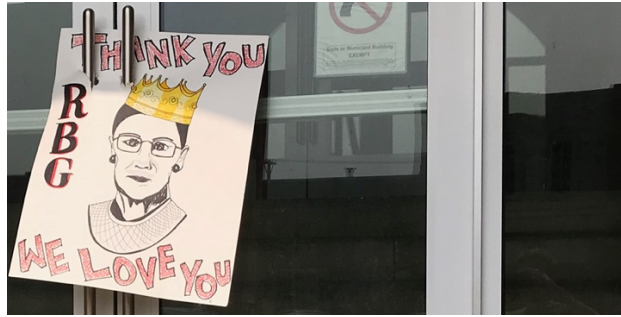


Figure 3: Social Class Mind Map

For example, here are some issues that you might generate using the four major categories in the mind map.

Education & Health	Jobs & Economy	Region & Politics	Race, Gender, & Ability
Student Debt	The Gig Economy (no contract jobs)	Rural Poverty	Social Class & Law Enforcement
Higher Education & Social Class	Welfare Benefits	Blue States, Red States	Social Class & Disability
First-Generation College Students	Social Mobility	Food Deserts	Single Mothers
The Digital Divide	Meritocracy		Women in STEM
Food Insecurity	Inequality		Masculinity & Social Class
	Unemployment		

Once you have narrowed the focus of your research, you should review your existing notes from shared readings, looking for useful examples and potential leads to new sources. Follow up on statistics, click on links to references, and keep an open mind.



Synthesis

Summary vs. Synthesis

Synthesis is one of the key goals of your Exploratory Essay. Instead of only including summaries or descriptions of your secondary sources, you are being asked to place them in conversation with each other, allowing your readers to see the ways in which these sources interact, converge (i.e., make similar points), or diverge (i.e., make contrasting points).

We also need to acknowledge that summarizing played an important role in your Reading Reflection essay, as it served as a touchstone for your own response, and it is playing a key role in helping you track ideas and develop your own thoughts for the Exploratory Essay.

Summarizing your sources helps you internalize what you're reading and makes it less likely that you'll inadvertently plagiarize; in short, it is good critical thinking and writing practice. But now it's time to build further on those skills by producing explanatory synthesis that helps readers learn more about the underlying perspectives on a topic related to social class in the U.S. by identifying similarities and differences among sources engaged in the topic and probing those connections for meaning. You must seek to put multiple sources in conversation with each other to craft a more sophisticated thematic approach than just a collection of sources and information.

How do you know when you are summarizing information versus when you are synthesizing information? Here's a handy guide:

Summary: How to Present Information Accurately and Fairly	Synthesis: How to Shape Information to Support Your Thesis
Reports others' ideas	Uses writer's own observations about others' ideas
Highlights important information of one source	Provides a specific focus under which to categorize the information and points from the sources
Remains objective in tone	Guides readers through multiple perspectives from more than one source at a time
Avoids making claims in support of or against the source's argument or content	Reflects on the meaning of sources' arguments or content
Organizes source material content chronologically	Organizes source material through connections, comparisons/contrasts, or other ways to support the overall theme or thesis

You might be wondering, though, how you could put those summaries you've written for your "reading for the conversation" notes and/or annotated bibliographies to good use? One answer is to create a "synthesis table" that begins with your summary, perhaps edited to its finest one-sentence clarity, and then uses guiding questions to help you see the conversation in which they're participating more obviously. Here is an example table:

Source citation	What is the primary focus or main idea of the text?	What are the points of agreement among texts?	What are the points of disagreement among texts?
Source #1			
Source #2			
Source #3			

You can continue to analyze these three sources by extending this table with other questions, such as the following:

- Does one author extend the research of another?
- Does any author raise new questions or ideas about the topic?
- Are there any author viewpoints that need to be acknowledged?

We can see evidence of synthesis planning in this student example paragraph where the writer acknowledges the ways her sources interact with each other, and build off each other's work:

In a different article written by Rotman, he continues to add to the conversation by writing that, "The biggest factor is that the technology-driven economy greatly favors a small group of successful individuals by amplifying their talent and luck" (Rotman). **This directly connects to the information provided by Kvochko, who discussed the addition of jobs that advanced technology would bring. What Rotman includes in his perspective is who is gaining those jobs,** making the point that not everyone is making money off the technology industry. Connecting this back to socioeconomic class means that the technology industry cannot help everyone gain socioeconomic status.¹⁵

Activity

As you read the next example, ask yourself what specific words the writer uses to

- identify other writers' ideas
- connect writers' ideas
- show the relationship between writers' ideas
- provide original analysis

While Garland and Wallace relate earnings of parents and educational opportunities for children, O'Shaughnessy and Burnsed relate SAT scores and degree fields to future earnings. Finally, the Pew Research Center manifests how earnings can, but ultimately don't, affect economic mobility or enable the Millennial generation to change their class. While these topics may seem uncorrelated, there is a connection between all of the arguments. Because Garland suggests that income affects early educational opportunities and O'Shaughnessy argues that

¹⁵ This paragraph is from Ayoka Lee's "Socioeconomic Status and Technology," which she wrote in Anna Goins Fall 2018 ENGL 100.

college readiness (by means of SAT score) in high school can indicate income, these respective conclusions can work together to form an argument that parent's income can affect prospective earnings in the workforce. Garland also reasons that the experiences a child has can affect their educational path, which relates to Burnsed's assertion that field of study is a great gauge for income. These separate arguments correlate in their respective logic that as Garland alludes that if a child were exposed to a STEM career or experience as a child and are led to pursue that path, which Garland indicates is likely, Burnsed would contend that this choice in career path will positively affect their income. With Garland's argument, she would conclude that the parent's income affected earnings. While each author argues about different aspects of education, all of the arguments are correlated in either a direct or indirect manner. All authors argue that education affects class, and class affects education.¹⁶

Activity

Drafting Activity & Mini-Workshop

In your notes, look for shared ideas and moments of disconnect or tension among your research, but make sure that you're not stretching to make a connection that's not relevant to the material or your theme or thesis. Then, using what you've learned about synthesis, write one body paragraph for your Exploratory Essay that references three (the required minimum) sources.

When you have completed your synthesis paragraph, exchange your paragraph draft with a classmate, or as the instructor directs, and use these questions to help each other achieve strong synthesis.

- What has the writer done to identify each source's ideas?
- What has the writer done to connect sources' ideas to each other?
- What specific words has the writer used to show the relationship between sources' ideas?
- Do you see the writer's own analysis among the connections being made?

¹⁶ This paragraph is from Gracie Danner's "Education in the United States," which she wrote in Cailin Roles' ENGL 100 class. Danner's essay appeared in the 2018 *Prairie Lights* (Expository Writing Program, Kansas State University).

Organizational Approach

When you're ready to outline or otherwise plan your exploratory essay, you will use a topical or thematic approach rather than a chronological or methodological pattern you might see in a science-related Literature Review. Organizing by theme helps you build on the thesis you've developed and stay focused on central ideas more so than particular writers or texts and is the most common approach for humanities-based work. This means that the body of your exploratory essay should not read as a mere list of summarized material but as a cohesive spotlight on the topic you've chosen.

The Exploratory Essay will consist of these three main sections:

Introduction

- Provide a title that highlights the overall focus of your issue or conversation.
- Introduce your overall issue or conversation; make sure you have reflected on your own interests and your audience's needs. If you can't articulate why the issue is compelling, you're not going to be able to emphasize its importance to your readers. Spend some time, preferably in a freewrite, identifying to yourself why you picked your topic, what you are finding interesting about it, what questions your research is raising, and what the societal implications and overall stakes are, among other questions.
- Highlight your thesis statement, your controlling main idea or claim; however, do not offer an argumentative claim or conceive of your issue as a problem-to-be-solved; instead, you are using your thesis to invite your readers to explore the multiple perspectives (i.e., your sources) that make up your conversation.
- Tell your readers what you hope they'll learn from your Exploratory Essay and why you think it matters.
- Forecast what you will be doing in your Exploratory Essay.

Body

- Guide your readers, allowing them to explore the conversation that you have introduced; let your readers know about the multiple perspectives that make up the conversation.
- Organize according to the main points, themes, or content of the conversation.

- Incorporate your secondary sources and synthesize them, bringing the sources into conversation with each other; your writers should know, at the very least, what is similar and what is different about these perspectives.
- Use topic sentences and transitions to explicitly tell your readers what you are doing and what to expect.
- When appropriate, state what is important or significant about your secondary sources and about what you are doing.
- Reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of sources.

Conclusion

- Provide a brief overview or summary of your most significant points.
- indicate where there might have been missing information in your essay – perhaps because you were unable to find the data you wanted – and address the ways you intended to use that information.
- Keep your focus on your readers and the conversation by reminding them of the overall significance of your topic – the “So what?” factor – and make sure you return to where you started.

In the chart below, you will find the different moves that you can make in each of the three major sections of the Exploratory Essay:

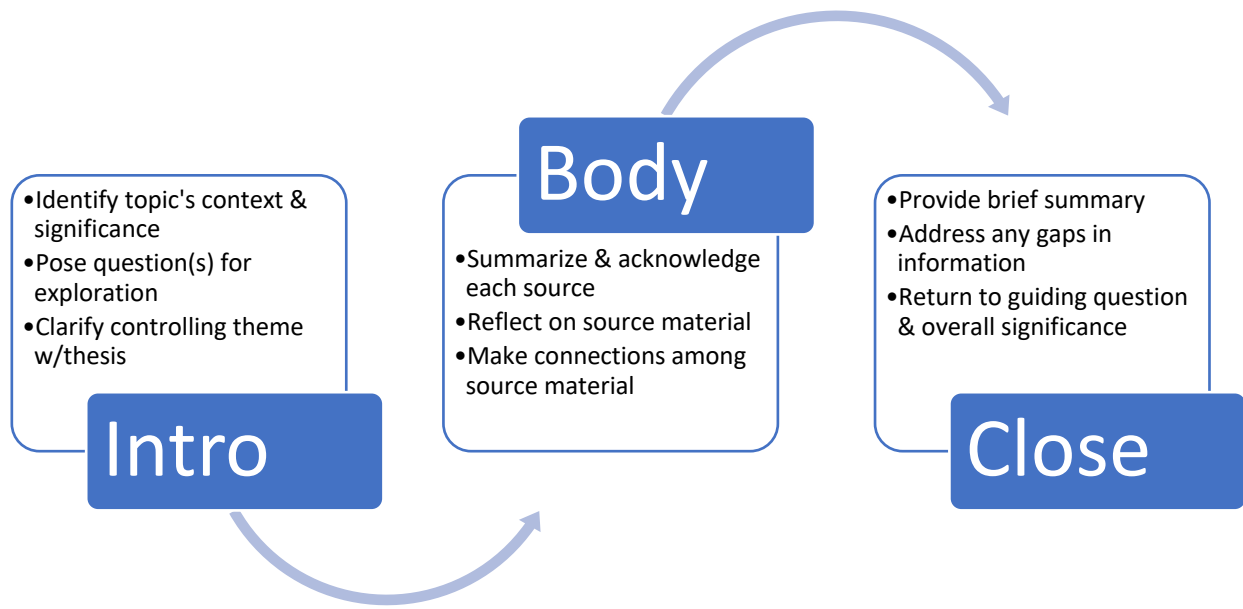


Figure 4. Organizational Approach for Exploratory Essay¹⁷

Listing Versus Synthesis

In the body of your Exploratory Essay, aim for **synthesis** – organizing your paragraphs according to a theme or points that connect to your overall thesis. Try to avoid **listing**, a simple organizational strategy in which writers describe or summarize one source after another, in which there is little interlinking of the different sources together.

What does synthesis look like, then, as an organizational approach? Perhaps the clearest way to answer this question is to count how many sources are being referenced in each paragraph.

In the two-paragraph excerpt below, the writer is offering marketing recommendations based on “generational differences” and utilizes the same source for each paragraph, a type of **listing** that prevents stronger analysis from developing.

Millennials are slowly taking over the workforce. They are most likely on social media so this is a great user base for LinkedIn. The first strategy to utilize when marketing to Millennials is to focus on innovation. Marketing to Millennials should take an approach that shows a new perspective on a common problem or task. This generation is easily infatuated by new things on social media. The second strategy is to use reviews. Millennials like to talk with their friends; 68% report that they won't make a major decision until they have discussed it with other people. This is a great way to market to

¹⁷ The organization graphic was adapted from “Drafting an Exploratory Essay,” University Writing & Speaking Center, The University of Nevada-Reno, <https://www.unr.edu/writing-speaking-center/student-resources/writing-speaking-resources/drafting-an-exploratory-essay>.

Millennials indirectly. The third and final strategy to utilize are radio commercials. Although this is a very old-fashioned, 93% of millennials listen to the radio for a total of around 11 hours per week. Another idea could even be to pay for an ad spot on podcasts since they are very popular in today's society (Generational Marketing).

Generation Z is very digitally savvy. The attention span of this generation user is just eight seconds – so first impressions really count. The first strategy to utilize when marketing to Generation Z is to sell experiences, and not products. This generation is more focused on the experience they will gain. The second marketing strategy to utilize are videos. Video content is key for Generation Z. 85% of teenagers are active on YouTube every day; and this is a perfect platform to get them hooked. The third strategy is to engage with customers. Building brand trust is extremely important to Generation Z. This generation believes that the key to an authentic brand is to respond to feedback and give responsiveness. The fourth and finally strategy is offer privacy. More than 88% of Gen Zers agreed that protecting their privacy was very important. It is important to be transparent and ensure their data is safe and secure (Generational Marketing).

Conversely, in this example, the student writer makes use of four different sources in their exploration of the theme, "Community."¹⁸ This is an example of **synthesis**. The items in bold highlight the ways in which the writer is allowing the various sources to interact with each other.

Creating a sense of community is an important element of any graduate school for a variety of reasons including an increased ability of students to network and advocate for each other, a sense of teamwork created, and the bonds formed between students and faculty that lead to increased happiness of the students. **Monica Moore argues that** people should create programs that focus on community building among graduate students, **which agrees with the interview of Anna Beyer**, where she stated that more social events at the start of the MAcc would help make connections early on and also help to include students with undergraduate degrees from different colleges. **Moore also challenges the idea** that graduate students are not willing to give up time for orientation activities, **but Beyer's suggestion of an increase in social events at the start**

¹⁸ You will find this student example in Chapter 4: Hannah Schneider's "Strength and Impact of Community Factors on Graduate Students in the Kansas State University Master of Accountancy Program."

of the program supplements this claim, demonstrating that graduate students do care about bonding with their peers. . .

Community can be important to build within graduate school, as previously shown by Moore, for a variety of reasons. **Derek Attig provides two main arguments** as to why community is important to graduate school. First, Attig claims that a strong community is crucial in providing a support system for students where they can advocate for each other and provide academic, professional, and personal support and encourage growth. **This statement is similar to what Dr. Terry Mason, the director of the MAcc program, expressed in his interview**, stating that the program provides many opportunities for career-changing networking, and allows for strong bonds to be formed amongst the students . . . **According to the K-State College of Business Administration**, the college features “small classes where interactions with professors and colleagues are encouraged.”

Topic Sentences and Transitions

Once you have designed the overarching structure of your essay and begun to place your important quotes, data, and other source material in their potential paragraphs, it's time to consider *how* you will move readers through your work. Remember that while you have been spending a lot of time with your sources, reading carefully and taking thoughtful notes, your own readers have not – so you must guide them on the exploratory path you've set. There are two writing strategies to employ for this endeavor: topic sentences and transitions.

Topic sentences are those opening lines of a paragraph that establish focus, and they also often function as transitions between sections and examples and signal the writer's attitude.

Transitions are those linking words or phrases that highlight the nature of connection – sequence, cause/effect, contrast, similarity, in addition, etc. – between or among examples.

[The Purdue Online Writing Lab](#) is a good source to expand your transition vocabulary.

Here is one student example that demonstrates the working relationship between the topic sentence and transitions.

Let's not be discouraged by the claims that social mobility is next to impossible in the U.S; it is difficult but not unachievable (topic sentence). Effective strategies require planning and perseverance, and efforts must begin somewhere, despite any reservations about the speed of progress. **In a similar observation that reinforces Clark's stance on education and social background as a legitimate mobility driver, social psychologist Wendy Johnson and fellow researchers claim (transitional phrase**

that identifies relationship between sources), “Previous studies have established that family social background and individual mental ability and educational attainment contribute to adult social class attainment. We propose that social class of origin acts as ballast, restraining otherwise meritocratic social class movement, and that post-secondary education is the primary means through which social class movement is both restrained and facilitated.” It would appear the best chances at real and long-lasting upward movement are achieved via intergenerational mobility coupled with self-improvement through continuing education.¹⁹

Here’s an example taken from the student sample essay shared later in this chapter that synthesizes source information in the useful “if, then” transitional format:

If affordability and quality of health care that Amadeo and Levey concern themselves about are truly the issues linking income and health care inequality, Diamond’s concerns about the cost and effectiveness of the solution are valid ones.²⁰

You can also use those attributive tags (please see “A Note About Quoting and Paraphrasing” below) to transition from one example to another, a strategy that can also help you avoid dropped quotations (i.e., quotations that will jar readers, as they appear to be dropped in without any preparation or introduction).

The examples above demonstrate how the organizational approach that supports discursive prose allows for the writer’s analysis to be develop in a more sophisticated and thoughtful way than the listing approach.

¹⁹ This paragraph is from Rodney Tsoodle’s “Post-Secondary Education, the Root of Upward Mobility in America,” written in Anna Goins’ Fall 2019 ENGL 100.

²⁰ This paragraph is from Sheldon Wilson’s “Wealth Determines Health,” which you will find at the end of this chapter (pp. 43-47).



Tone & Style: Invitational Approaches

What does it mean to say that you should take an invitational (i.e., neutral and engaging) approach as the tone and style of your Exploratory Essay? You know that you *are not* making an argumentative claim around the topic, such as “We can solve the problem of housing in the U.S. by doing a, b, and c.” You know, instead, that you *are* making an informative claim on the issue or conversation, such as “We can learn more about the problem of housing in the U.S. by looking at a, b, and c.”

Because of this neutral, informative purpose, your introduction plays a crucial role in establishing tone. Here’s a student example:

Minimal Costs or Not?

Currently, the fifteen-dollar minimum wage is a hotly debated topic. Workers are holding strikes in a “Fight for Fifteen” all over the United States. **The question must be raised, is raising the federally mandated minimum wage the solution to poverty, or will it negatively affect employment, hurting those it is meant to help?** While everyone would agree higher wages would greatly benefit the poor, there is disagreement about whether a minimum wage is the most effective approach. To gain an informed understanding, we must look at the ripple effects of minimum wage on workers, businesses, and the labor market as a whole. **By having a conversation, learning from the views of others, and acting in one accord, we can learn and achieve more than by competing against each other.**²¹

²¹ From Nathan Featherstone’s “Minimal Costs or Not?” (*Re)Writing Communities and Identities*, 5th ed., pp. 173-176.

Notice the choices this student writer has made in this introduction, starting with the title itself, written as a question, to establish an invitational tone for the essay. Specifically, consider how they use additional questions to engage readers and set a path toward learning together. We should also note how the writer has established a clear issue on which to focus – the relationship between minimum wage and poverty – under the larger umbrella topic of socioeconomic status in the U.S.

Overall, the following list offers a variety of strategies you can employ to create and maintain an appropriate tone for your exploratory essay.

- Make the conversation clear and engaging
 - Establish an explicit purpose for the essay.
 - Ask questions to interact with readers.
 - Make comparisons or contrasts between two or more sources (i.e. synthesis).
 - Utilize transitional words and phrases that highlight the relationship between examples.
 - Reflect on what you have learned, or come to realize, in the course of researching-for-and-writing this essay.
- Demonstrate your own fairness and neutrality
 - Summarize sources accurately and objectively.
 - Choose specific and accurate words to describe the topic.
 - Use a variety of sources to prove your ability to see the topic from multiple viewpoints.
 - Show the common ground between different positions.
 - Offer your own perspective, likely in the conclusion, as a way of supporting the significance of the conversation.



A Note about Quoting and Paraphrasing

As you work to summarize your sources for this essay, you'll want to keep in mind when to paraphrase and when to quote directly. You should only quote directly when the exact wording is important to your purpose. When you do directly quote a source, you need to use the exact words from the original source. Those words **MUST** also be in quotation marks and you must

include citation information either in the signal phrase, in the parenthetical citation, or a combination of the two.

However, often you simply need to summarize or paraphrase the information. In fact, using too many direct quotes can result in other peoples' words taking over your essay. You've been practicing summarizing, which is, in many ways, just another word for paraphrasing. When you paraphrase source material, you must be true to the content of the original source material, but you must change the wording and the sentence structure. To properly paraphrase, you need to put the source material into your own words. Paraphrased material should not be in quotation marks but you still **MUST** include the citation information (the author, the name of the source text, and the page number) either in the signal phrase, in the parenthetical citation, or a combination of the two.

Below are examples of improper and proper paraphrasing.

Original source material

"Millennials are also the first in the modern era to have higher levels of student loan debt, poverty and unemployment, and lower levels of wealth and personal income than their two immediate predecessor generations (Gen Xers and Boomers) had at the same stage of their life cycles" (Pew Research 149–150).

Improper Paraphrasing

Millennials are the first in the recent years to have more college debt, fewer jobs, and less money than the previous generations had at the same time in their lives (Pew Research 149–150).

While we have changed some of the words, we haven't changed the sentence structure. Instead, we've just plugged synonyms into the original sentence structure. Even though we've included the citation information, this paraphrase would be considered (unintentional) plagiarism because it's too close to the original source material.

Improper Paraphrasing

People from my generation (called Millennials) are the first generation to be doing better than the generations before them (Pew Research 149–150).

In this case, while we've changed the words and sentence structure, we've lost the actual meaning of the original text. In fact, we've completely misrepresented the content of the original source material.

Proper Paraphrasing

According to the Pew Research Center, Millennials are the first group to be doing worse than the two generations that have gone before them. More specifically, Millennials tend to be less likely than previous generations to have good jobs and the wealth that accompanies those jobs. They also find themselves further in debt (especially in regard to school loans) than their parents and grandparents were (149–150).

Here we've kept the same information as the original source material, but we've changed the wording and the sentence structure. We've included the information about the author in the signal phrase, letting a reader know where the paraphrase/ summary starts and we've included the page numbers in the parenthetical information at the end, which lets a reader know where the paraphrase ends.

In-Text Citations & Attributive Tags

You must also remember to include citations for all outside source information, whether that information is directly cited or paraphrased, and to make clear for readers where/from what source that information is coming. We do this by including parenthetical citations and attributive tags/introductory phrases that provide source identification.

You can see an example of the parenthetical citation in the "Original Source Material" example above: (Pew Research 149–150). These citations coordinate with the Works Cited page and offer readers an easy way to follow-up on your sources.

You can see an example of an attributive tag in the "Proper Paraphrasing" example above: "According to the Pew Research Center." Such tags work to differentiate your words from your sources and help build and maintain credibility with your readers.

If the author of your source is a person, you would use their last name (or, in the case of multiple writers, last names) in the citation along with the page number of the referenced material; the attributive tag uses the author's full name upon first reference and then only the last name in subsequent citations.

Workshop

Use the following workshop guide to interact with drafts of the Exploratory Essay as directed by your instructor. Reviewing the assignment guidelines from the beginning of the chapter is helpful before you start reading. Treat your classmate's draft just as carefully as you've been

treating your own writing process: thoughtful engagement and specific example are necessary for a productive workshop.

Purpose/Focus

- Even though the writer should not be making an explicit argument in this essay, the essay should still have a clear sense of purpose and focus. Where does the writer establish purpose in the introduction? What would you add or takeaway?
- As you read, underline any parts of the essay that do not seem to fit within the larger focus and purpose of the essay.

Development

- Pay close attention to how the writer uses their required three outside sources.
 - Do you, as a reader, get enough information to understand the gist of the outside sources? Does the writer include *too much* or *too little* summary information? Why do you think so?
 - Where is the writer using **synthesis** to show the relationship among sources? In what ways is the synthesis effective or ineffective?
- If the writer has included personal experience or observation, does it help you as a reader better understand the topic and/or the topic's significance? Does it support the exploratory nature of the essay, or detract from the overall effectiveness of the essay?

Organization

- Is there a recognizable structure to the essay with a clear introduction, body, and conclusion? How can you tell?
- Has the writer relied too much on the list approach rather than using **synthesis** as an organizational tool? Why do you think so?
- Do the topic sentences and transitions help guide you from one moment to the next? Point out one clear positive example and note any weaknesses.

Tone/Style

- Keeping a neutral and engaged tone is crucial to this essay. Highlight any words or phrases within the draft that could be read as aggressive or dismissive or could make a reader feel defensive.
- Has the writer achieved an invitational tone? What makes you think so?

Overall

- On your separate sheet of paper, explain the *two* strongest parts of the draft. Keeping the assignment objectives in mind, *why* are these the two strongest parts of the essay? How do they help meet important objectives?
- On your separate sheet of paper, explain the *two* areas of the essay that the writer should most focus on in revision. Keeping the objectives in mind, why are those two areas the most important for revision?

Student Example

Wealth Determines Health

Sheldon Wilson

Sheldon Wilson wrote this exploratory essay in Taylee Helms' ENGL 100 Spring 2021 class. It won second place in the 2020 Expository Writing Program Essay Awards. Note: Wilson wrote this for a previous version of the assignment.

The issue of health care in America can bring disagreeing factions to a frothing rage of vitriol as they argue what should and should not be done. Casting aside the stances these factions would take, the issue of affordable health care is becoming inseparable from the issue of increasing income disparity in America. Over the past few decades, the threshold for quality health care has risen at a rate that is leaving more Americans behind. Proponents of universal health care argue that it would cast a lifeline down to these Americans sinking further toward economic despair. The opposition are concerned with the problems of how it would be paid for or if it

would reduce quality even further. If one listens long enough to both sides, at times it seems as if productive debate has ceased. As complicated issues often seem to do, the debate has boiled down to being for or against trying to fix the system. A better understanding of those on both sides and the underlying issues stoking the fiery debate is necessary to fully grasp how we have reached this point.

Tying health care to class requires looking beyond what the literal obstacles to health care are. Most Americans gain access to health insurance, and thus health care, through their jobs. Which seems like it makes for a quick first round for the opposition; be a productive member of society by having a job and you get access to health care. This has some truth to it but runs the risk of ignoring some potential gray areas. Insurance does not immediately beget affordable health care, which is the root of the issue. In the article “Health Insurance Deductibles Soar, Leaving Americans With Unaffordable Bills”, Noam N. Levey, finds that even amongst Americans with insurance through their jobs, deductibles and premiums are outpacing incomes of millions of American families. Casting the issue of health care as one of access is disingenuous at best. As an investigative reporter, Levey thoroughly researched the passing of a recent attempted solution, the Affordable Care Act. Ultimately, he asserts, an act that failed to address the true roots of the issue. The “affordable” part is a misnomer, as the act ignored the issue of affordability for most Americans: deductibles, premiums, and other hidden costs of health care. Most Americans already have insurance through their jobs; a solution that granted more access to insurance is not going to pay unaffordable medical bills. Soaring costs of every aspect of health care is ultimately pricing the average American out of even being able to use the insurances they do have. To highlight how this has not always been the case, Levey notes in his research that “As recently as 2006, nearly half of workers had a health plan with no deductible at all: Their insurance began immediately covering medical costs, often requiring them to pay, at most, a small percentage of their bills” (Levey). Rising costs is making health care something for only those with the means to afford it. As more Americans live paycheck-to-paycheck every year, those with the means becomes a smaller and smaller number. Levey would seem to believe that any effective solution needs to address the issue of affordability, not accessibility.

The consequence of medical costs growing alongside the wage gap in America means those without expendable income are forgoing trips to the doctor for what they perceive as minor illnesses and injuries. This does have a positive effect of reducing the overall strain on the health care industry by lowering the number of ultimately unnecessary doctor visits, which would increase availability and lower costs. The issue can arise when minor problems are ignored long enough to become serious. In “Health Care Inequality in America”, economic

analyst Kimberly Amadeo presents a more direct relation of the overlap between income and health care inequality; maintaining the same overall issue as Levey: affordability. She furthers the idea that minor issues can become major, or even chronic, issues. Issues that can create a vicious cycle degrading both income and health care. Poor health requires more of the expensive medical treatment and can cause job loss from too many sick days; medical bills and job loss reduce expendable income which impact the ability to afford health care. She notes that being lower income usually implies living in more impoverished areas, which often have lower quality health care facilities than more affluent areas. Eventually desperation finds its way to the emergency rooms of hospitals, the one place that cannot turn patients away. Amadeo uses this to address the concerns of universal health care increasing taxes by demonstrating that these only choice visits already do so: "These uninsured patients cost hospitals a staggering \$10 billion a year. The hospitals passed this cost along to Medicaid. That cost is added to your tax bill" (Amadeo). In her eyes, universal health care would grant everyone access to proper health care while not changing or even reducing overall costs.

Concerned voices in opposition to the idea of universal health care believe that income inequality is not the driving cause behind health care inequality, and such systems would be a hopeful solution with destructive outcomes. Voices such as Dr. Michael A. Diamond, who in his article "Con: Single-Payer Health Care, Why It's Not the Best Answer," expresses his concern with these solutions. These concerns being the inevitable bloating of government-run systems, proper use even with access, and a degradation in the quality of health care in America. Clever use of data allows supporters such as Amadeo to make the argument that administrative costs are the reason for increased health care costs. Increasing government oversight would just shift these costs from taxed private insurers to government bureaucracies, paid for by the taxpayers. Another issue he raises is that even those with access to adequate insurance and care do not seek preventative care properly as is. The system would become burdened when people continue to wait until the issue is dire and costs to the system have increased exponentially. Government oversight is a further concern of Diamond's. Medical workers would become regulated by a single payer with no competition for prices. He points out an already existing problem with government-operated systems by stating "Physicians are already inadequately reimbursed for services provided under Medicaid, and reductions in Medicare reimbursement over the years have demonstrably affected access and quality of care in a variety of health care venues" (Diamond). Health care for all is in his mind is still a noble goal that should be achieved, but systems proposed by those such as Amadeo are further problems and not solutions.

If affordability and quality of health care that Amadeo and Levey concern themselves about are truly the issues linking income and health care inequality, Diamond's concerns about the cost and effectiveness of the solution are valid ones. Health care inequality runs deeper than just being the costs associated, however. Returning to the reality that insurance is often linked to employment, I once found myself taking and keeping a job I hated entirely because it provided me with insurance I could afford to use at the time. I, like many others outside of higher-income brackets, found myself making life choices around being able to just afford health care. Even with insurance I began to realize how little it really helped me feel financially comfortable. Increasing deductibles, as mentioned by Levey, make insurance feel almost pointless unless you have the money to meet them. I was lower-middle class at best and certainly didn't, and I was not alone. "In 2016, the most recent year with available data, just half of single households and six in 10 multi-person households had even \$2,000 in available savings" (Levey). High-deductible plans such as mine can easily double or triple that \$2,000 mark. Even with insurance I realized the outcome of something catastrophic happening to me was crippling bills for years or bankruptcy, and again I was not alone. "Even those in the middle class who have insurance face devastation from health care inequality. In 2015, medical bankruptcies affected 1 million people. The insured were 3% more likely to declare bankruptcy than the uninsured" (Amadeo). As income inequality increases, the lower and middle classes are one accident away from losing everything they've worked for. Those with means are not only less concerned with such things, but even get better treatment. The recent pandemic of Covid-19 has made for a demonstration of this effect. Many deemed "essential" personnel are only tested when they meet a strict set of circumstances or symptoms. Yet a quick browse through social media shows well-off celebrities, many of which are asymptomatic, stating the results of their tests.

If income and health care are so intertwined, the increasing of income disparity will need to be addressed in order to find a solution. Amadeo suggests universal health care through whatever means necessary to even the playing field. Others such as Levey aren't so ready to make a choice yet provide countless pieces of evidence that the problem is getting worse, not better. Even critics to single-payer universal systems such as Diamond "...would welcome a system that can provide health care for all..." (Diamond). It's an issue not easily solved, but one that cannot wait forever to be addressed.

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Chapter 4

Community Informative Report



Community Informative Report Assignment Description

Your Community Informative Report will be 5-8 double-spaced pages (approximately 1500-2400 words) and written in a professional report format. You will identify a community and blend together primary and secondary research to make this community interesting and relevant to a public or professional audience. You will need to explain what is culturally and socially significant about your research and why it should interest your readers. You should incorporate at least five primary and secondary sources. When you complete your report, you will write an abstract that will provide your readers with an overview of your report, including the community you have investigated, your major findings, and your points of significance. You will place the abstract before your introduction.

There are several purposes that you can explore for this report. For example, you may conduct a mini-ethnography on your community, meaning that you are interested in revealing how this community works for your readers: who are the members, and how do they interact with each other? What different roles do members have? How do new members learn to become “experts” in this community? What are the values that unite these members? Students have produced effective ethnographies on local daycare centers, athletic teams, musical groups, and civic organizations, among many other possibilities. Both face-to-face and online communities can be good candidates for a mini-ethnography. For example, students have explored how people have created online communities to learn and play the card game, Yu-Gi-Oh!, or to inspire their creative writing.

You can also research a community to respond to misconceptions that your audience might have. For example, what misconceptions could you address by researching such communities as the local chapter of the NRA, a fraternity, 4H, the Flinthills Pagans, or the KSU Star Wars Club? What are some interesting cultural or social points you could explore by addressing the misconceptions about these groups?

Another purpose angle could be to explore an issue in terms of a community. For example, you may be interested in researching how a local company trains its employees to address diversity-based controversies that national chains, such as Starbucks, have experienced. Or, you may be interested in researching the gender gap that exists in the College of Engineering or another academic unit on campus.

As you explore your purpose, you will more than likely discover that you need to be adaptable and open to new possibilities as you conduct additional primary and secondary research. Your community informative report asks you to consider your research before you focus on a main point of significance.

Who Will Read Your Report?

You will be writing to a public or professional audience of your choice. You'll want to find a "stakeholder" who has a public or professional presence locally, regionally, or nationally, and who has an interest either in your community or in the larger questions or issues that you are exploring.

You could write to public or professional leaders at K-State, local officials, state officials, or officials back in your hometown. You could write to audiences at a national level who would be interested in what you have to say about this local group. For example, if you are exploring an issue in a local workplace community, you might want to address executives at the national headquarters or a professional organization that is relevant to this local workplace.

Similar to the openness and adaptability you'll need to practice when you are identifying possible report purposes, you'll first come up with a tentative audience as you get started, and you should expect to be flexible: as you learn more about your community and conduct additional research, your thinking about an appropriate audience may also change. Please keep in mind the informative goals of the community informative report. You are not attempting to persuade your audience about how to think about the community. Rather, you are providing them with information that is relevant and interesting for them.

What Will the Community Informative Report Look Like?

You will use a report format. First, you will include a title page that includes these four elements:

Title

Your name

Reader (Contact name, organization, address)

Date

Your abstract and introduction begin on the second page. You should use major headings, which separate your introduction, results, analysis, and Works Cited/References section. More than likely, you will use sub-headings to emphasize different points in your body section. When you use major headings, make sure to center them and/or bold or italicize them.

Look at the table on the next page for some of the questions that you can respond to in the core three sections:

Introduction	Results	Analysis
What is your main purpose in this report?	What are the main patterns or “hotspots” from your research?	
What community have you chosen and whom have you interviewed?	What research questions have you explored?	What are the main take-away points from the results section that readers should hang on to?
How will this community be relevant and interesting for your readers?	What research chunks are the most important and relevant for your readers?	What is significant about this community in terms of culture and society?
What important background or context does your reader need to know?	What does your community insider say about the community that is important for your readers?	How can the results be helpful for your readers in thinking about the community or making decisions?
What is your overall main point of significance?	What do your secondary research sources say?	What about your research will be surprising for your readers or may counter expectations or misconceptions?
What should your readers expect?	How can you synthesize your secondary research sources and your interview data?	

Objectives

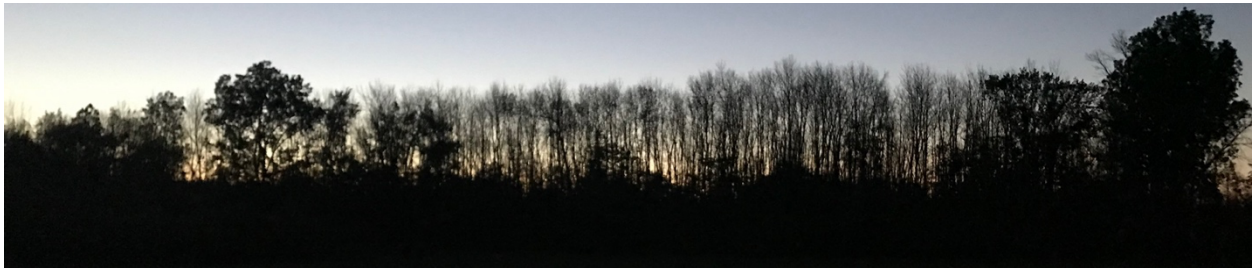
By the end of the assignment, you should be able to do the following:

- Define “community” and be able to discuss the social and cultural characteristics of communities
- Identify an audience for which the community is relevant and significant and be able to explain why this audience is interested in your findings
- Conduct basic secondary ethnographic research strategies, including conducting an interview, observing, and collecting materials
- Research your community using appropriate and relevant secondary sources
- Evaluate the appropriateness and credibility of your research sources
- Synthesize, paraphrase, and blend primary and secondary research sources

- Integrate primary and secondary research sources in your writing
- Follow the professional expectations of the report genre
- Create an abstract of your study
- Apply basic principles of MLA/APA citation style (in-text citations and MLA Works Cited or APA References sections) to avoid plagiarism

Rationale

This assignment relates directly to several of the K-State Undergraduate Student Learning Outcomes, including knowledge, diversity, communication, and academic and professional integrity. The Community Informative Report asks you to gain experience with primary and secondary research strategies that you may need to use in projects and writing assignments in your classes at K-State. Most importantly, this assignment asks you to pay attention to your audience to figure out how your community is significant for them. In many of your classes in ENGL 200 and beyond, you'll be asked to consider your audiences, evaluate the credibility of your sources, and find effective ways to organize and integrate these sources.



What is a Community?

Early in the semester, we read about social construction, which refers to how meanings, attitudes, norms, and expectations reflect a social basis; expectations about gender identity, for example, come from how communities of people discuss, negotiate, and impose particular ideas about masculinity and femininity.

In short, communities help construct social identities and meanings and they, in turn, are socially constructed. In our classroom community, we'll need to arrive at a way of talking about, defining, and demarcating communities. Indeed, even the term "community" is debated, and anthropologists and others have considered alternatives such as "community of practice," "social-learning environment," and "knowledge-building community."

One important way of choosing a community may be by looking at the goals and purposes of groups of people. If people assemble together and share a consistent goal or purpose over a period of time, we might start to consider this group to be a community. In any case, you and your classmates need to make decisions on how to distinguish a community from a random

assemblage of people who happen to be close to each other or interacting with each other. Not every collection of people is a community. There needs to be some unifying purpose or way to distinguish one community from another, or one community from a disorganized and disunited mass of people. People that you observe walking down the street are not communities—unless, of course, they are participating together in a formal or informal walking club.

As a researcher, you'll need to focus your community to make it meaningful for your readers and manageable for you to research. Large, amorphous groups, such as "members of the K-State community" or "inhabitants of Manhattan, KS" (or, even "Americans") may technically be considered communities; yet, they are far too huge, diverse, and unwieldy for you to research. At the same time, you might be able to find extremely small and informal groups of people—such as friends who share educational and social goals—yet the behaviors or practices of this group may be so inconsistent and informal that you will again struggle to make much sense of it. Here is one example. The members in the audience of a live performance of the Korean boy band, BTS, do not constitute a community. Yet, BTS "A.R.M.Y." global fan club members probably do constitute an audience.

One researcher of "communities of practice," J. H. Erik Andriessen, organizes communities according to two keyterms, connectivity and institutionalization.¹ Connectivity refers to how closely connected the people in the community are; for example, members of a reading group who meet on a biweekly basis and know each other a great deal, may be thought of as having a high degree of connectivity; members of groups who rarely interact or communicate with each other may have less connectivity. Institutionalization refers to the community itself: How formal is this group? Is it recognized by other legal bodies? Are there clear and explicit goals and rules? A state professional organization such as the Kansas Association of Teachers of English, for example, is highly institutionalized. It has a published constitution, officers and committees, as well as a yearly conference. Another community, such as a K-State intramural women's rugby team, may have little in the way of codified rules and practices.

Other variables that can help you categorize and make sense of communities are the following:

Size: What is the scope or size of the community; if you are exploring a homeschooling community, are you really interested in looking at a close-knit group of a local homeschooling organization? Or, are you interested in looking at the much larger national movement of homeschooling?

Scale: Scale refers to a geographic conception of the community. From the researcher's perspective, communities that are quite close to them can be considered as "personal" or "local" communities; researchers next might look at communities at the

¹ Andriessen, J. H. Erik. "Archetypes of Knowledge Communities." *Communities and Technologies*, edited by P. van den Besselaar, G. De Michelis, J. Preece, and C. Simone, Springer, 2005.

neighborhood, university, or city level; larger scales may then be at the state level, region, or nation; the largest scale for a community would be at the international or global level.

Gatekeeper: This is an interesting variable that you may be interested in exploring. It describes how open (inclusive) versus how closed (exclusive) the community is in terms of allowing in new members. Who is allowed to join, and what are the requirements? What social or cultural restrictions do outsiders face?

Medium: This variable asks the researcher to explore how members of the community communicate and interact with each other. Do members do this through face-to-face interactions; or, do they primarily meet online? Is there a combination of these interaction methods?

Purpose: What are the stated (explicit) goals of this group. What are the implicit (secret or unstated) goals of this group?

Longevity: How long has this group been around? Would you call it a well-established community or a relatively new one?

As you begin to think about possible communities, this assignment asks you to consider communities that you do not already belong to. This restriction allows you to learn something new and to be able to observe this community more objectively as an outsider. Importantly, this restriction protects you if your research uncovers community-based attitudes, values, or practices that you find troubling.

You should consider a range of communities, yet make sure that you can identify an “insider,” “informant,” or “spokesperson” for this group who is willing to talk with you. This interview participant should be accessible to you; in fact, as you begin this unit, you should be able to interview your insider within the first week; if you are working on a virtual community, then you may want to pursue some alternatives to a face-to-face interview, such as an instant-messenger/text question-and-answer session or use of Zoom, Skype, or other digital ways of connecting. You should also be able to ask your insider some additional questions if you need to develop your report.

Here are some general types of communities that you might want to consider:

- Workplaces
- Student groups and organizations
- Community/civic groups and organizations
- Academic programs or classes
- Sports/athletic leagues or clubs

- Gaming or fan-based groups
- Online communities

As you make your decision about what community to explore, do remember that you'll need to be able to explore the cultural and social significance of the group for your readers. If you feel that you are going to struggle coming up with something interesting to say about this group, then keep on considering other options. That being said, you might be surprised by what you'll be able to come up with that is socially and culturally significant about this group.

To give you some ideas about the rich diversity of official communities at the university, local, and regional level, please consider the groups in this following table (click on the hyperlinks to learn more about these organizations):

Community Conversations on Race and Reconciliation	Citizenship in Action (4H)	Equal Justice Coalition
Flint Hills Human Rights Project	Flint Hills Wellness Coalition	Hidden Common Ground Initiative
Renters Together, Manhattan Alliance for Peace & Justice	Manhattan Resiliency Coalition	Northview Rising
First Tee Program	Kansas Health Foundation	Youth Community Perceptions

Here are some additional local groups:

- Wounded Warrior United
- Aggieville Business Association
- Flint Hills Wisdom Keepers
- Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education (KACEE)
- Civitas Group - Green Apple Bikes
- T. Russell Reitz Animal Shelter
- Food and Farm Council of Riley County and City of Manhattan
- North Central Flint Hills Area Agency on Aging
- Manhattan Riley County Preservation Alliance
- Manhattan Alliance for Peace and Justice
- Flint Hills Renewable Energy & Efficiency Cooperative, Inc.
- Wonder Workshop Children's Museum

Community Inventory

Create a list of all of the communities that you belong to. You can start with larger communities, in which people are brought together loosely, such as “citizens of the United States” or “Kansas State undergraduate.” Then, consider smaller, more local and personal communities. Focusing on one of these communities, ask yourself:

- What makes this group a community? What is the shared goal?
- How official or unofficial is this group?
- How interconnected are the members of this group?
- What is significant about it? What makes it interesting?

Share your community inventories with your classmates. Is there someone thinking about communities in the way that you hadn’t thought about before? Are there any communities that you find intriguing? Perhaps you can find your “community insider” in your own class.

Choose one of your communities and, with a partner, begin to examine it with several of the following community variables:

- Connectivity
- Institutionalization
- Size
- Scale
- Gatekeeper
- Medium
- Purpose
- Longevity

Considering an Online/Virtual Community

If you are looking for a community to analyze and research, an online or virtual community may be an excellent option. During the last decade, online communities have become some of the most important sites in sustaining individuals, providing them with friendship and interaction, and providing them access to information. Of course, you are probably aware of some of the concerns about online communities, as places in which like-minded congregate, pushing these online community members towards extremes and further polarizing the ideological landscapes of the United States. They have also been blamed for, among other things, destabilizing the economy, purveying false information and conspiracy theories, and encouraging eating disorders and other risky behaviors.

As you search your apps, social platforms, or the Internet for online groups, you'll want to find a group that will interest you and your audience and allow you to come up with a significant thesis. You'll also want to make sure the group is dynamic and interactive, as you'll want to collect evidence and take notes. Finally, you'll want to feel comfortable serving as an observer. Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Clubhouse, Facebook, YouTube, and Reddit are the types of virtual spaces where you may find communities to observe and analyze.

Once you have found an online community, you can pursue many of the same questions and processes that you would for a physical community. A research methodology of anthropology, netnography, serves as one way to collect information about an online community. Here are some of the questions that a "netnographer" might ask:

- What languages are used by members of the online community when they are interacting with each other?
- How formal or informal are these language choices?
- What are the terms or phrases that make up the "insider" language of the community?
- What are the icons, visuals, or symbols that members share?
- What are the modes for interaction? (print, aural/oral, visual, etc.)
- How do members name and represent themselves?
- What are the rules for how people become members and how they interact with each other? Are these rules official or unofficial?
- What are the demographics of the community in terms of gender/sex, age, ability, race, ethnicity, etc.?

For example, if you explore the talk-based social application, Clubhouse, you might come across an international community such as this group of Mongolians (situated in Mongolia, the United States, and throughout the world), who meet regularly to discuss the social and political development of Mongolia and, as in this image, the 2021 presidential election:



You'll also find that Clubhouse has explicit values and rules that it expects all of the Clubhouse groups to respect. Here are the official "principles" of Clubhouse:

Principles

Clubhouse was designed to be a space for authentic conversation and expression—where people can have fun, learn, make meaningful connections, and share rich experiences with others around the world. Below are a few guiding principles that we believe are important.

Be yourself. The authenticity of Clubhouse begins with the people.

Be respectful. This applies to every person, at all times.

Be inclusive. Tolerate, welcome, and consider diverse people and perspectives.

Build empathy and understanding. Engage in debates that are in good faith.

Foster meaningful and genuine connections. This is what Clubhouse is all about.

You may not find it necessary to interview a member of this online, as you may discover you have a lot of data to analyze. However, you'll want to keep on investigating the community, take notes, freewrite, and look for something interesting and significant for your audience about this group. How does this online community function? How does it satisfy its members more than a traditional, face-to-face group? What misconceptions about this community might your readers have, and how can you inform them?

Testing Community Appropriateness

To what extent can you consider these following communities as being appropriate ones for the informative report? What might be some drawbacks? What are some criteria or "rules" that you can use to decide upon your community? What might be some ways to focus these groups to find more suitable communities?

- Your particular ENGL 100 class
- The class of students from your high school with whom you graduated
- All people who play Minecraft
- Owners of restaurants in the Midwest
- People who love animals
- Harry Potter fans

Identifying Your Audience

Consider who will be interested in learning more about this community you are exploring. If you are exploring a workplace community, then perhaps a professional audience may be interested, either at the local level (the managers or owners of the company or organization) or the regional/national level (the regional headquarters). If you are exploring a student organization, you might consider a K-State audience or even a professional organization at the national level. If you are exploring a community that might have interesting moments of significance for such cultural and social conversations as gender, race/ethnicity, or national identity, you might consider an organization that is invested in these conversations.

Here is a brief list of some possible audiences:

- A public audience?
- An executive or officer for a national company?
- A head of a professional organization, NGO, or non-profit organization?
- A local, state, or national politician?
- The head of a department or division at Kansas State?

Search online for a contact person and try to find something about them.

Get their name, title, and contact information. If possible, find a mission statement for the organization (check the “About Us” if this audience has a website). What points or values from the mission statement will be important for you to consider?

Your audience becomes extremely important in this report, as you will be showing them how the research about the community relates to their needs, interests, and expectations. As you write and revise the report, you may discover that you need to change audiences to one that is more relevant for you and your research.

With your classmates, brainstorm some possible audience ideas. Here is one example:

Community: An online LinkedIn “community” devoted to graduates from a particular Kansas high school.

Who might be interested in this community, and why?

LinkedIn Executive Team: They may be interested in how communities are forming and building around interests or identities that may not have been in the initial vision of this online company.

High School Principal or District Superintendent: They may be interested in this community for several reasons, such as figuring out the demographics of committed alumni or trying to identify the overall values of this group.

Faculty in the Education Department: They may be interested in how relationships endure long after graduation from high school.

Local or Regional Politician: Similar to some of the other audiences, they may be interested in examining the ways in which the members of this alumni group represent themselves and how they identify themselves with their hometowns or high school, especially if they have moved far away.

Identifying and Contacting Your Community Insider

As you settle on the community you want to explore, you’ll want to contact at least one “community insider” whom you can interview and learn from. You should be able to interview this insider within the next week, and you can conduct the interview face-to-face, by telephone, and by various digital platforms (Zoom, Skype, Facetime, etc.). At times, especially if your insider is a member of an online community, you may be able to use a texting platform.

Inquire whether your community insider will be willing to meet and talk with you. A thorough interview will take 30-45 minutes, and you may have to follow up with some additional questions as you draft your report. Tell your community insider the types of questions that you will be asking.

Make sure that you also discuss these points with your community insider as you prepare for the interview:

- What format will your interview take? (e.g., face-to-face or online; will you be able to provide your questions ahead of time?)
- Will your community insider agree to being recorded?
- Can you find a time to observe and/or participate with the community?
- Will your community insider allow you to use his or her name, or will you have to provide a pseudonym?

Creating Interview Questions

Though the types of questions that you will explore depend upon your overall research questions, the following list includes questions that typically connect communities to cultural and social issues:

- Typically, what type of people make up the members of this community?
- What are particularly important terms or concepts for this community? (i.e., what is the “lexis”—the special vocabulary—that links members of this community together?)
- How do members become members of this community?
- How do members learn how to become “good” members of this community?
- How can “newcomers” draw negative attention to themselves?
- What do “old-timers” consider to be important?
- How are the rules of this community made known to members?
- To what extent are the rules “written” or “unwritten” (official or unofficial)?
- What do members do?
- How do people learn in this community?
- What are the “obvious” things that they learn? What are the more “secret” things that they learn?

- What are the ways that members of this community communicate with each other?
- What do members of this group typically write or read about?
- What different types of members are there in this community? How do members differentiate themselves from each other? How do they label each other?
- How do members stop being members?
- What other communities does this community closely associated itself with?
- What other communities does this community clearly separate itself from?
- How are the leaders of this community selected?
- What are the main social or cultural purposes of this community?
- When did this community start?
- What are any important distinguishing features of this group?
- What metaphors do members use when they talk about this community?

Look at the questions in the list above, and then consider ways to adapt them or make them more specific for the community you are going to be exploring.

Create a range of different types of questions, moving from closed-form ones, in which you are only expecting yes/no or brief responses to more open-ended questions. You should consider questions that will generate more of a response from your participant:

- What's your favorite thing about being a member of this community?
- What story can you tell about something that happened to you (either good or bad) as a member of this community?
- What are the concerns that you have, if any, about this community?

In addition to **closed** (convergent) questions and **open-ended questions** (divergent), you can consider **hypothetical** and **mirror/spontaneous** questions. Hypothetical questions are a form of open-ended question in which you are asking your interview participant to react to a hypothetical situation. For example, if you were interviewing a member of a male athletic team at K-State and you were interested in broader issues of diversity, you could consider a hypothetical question such as the following: "How would you and your teammates respond to an official meeting in which issues of sexual orientation were the main focus?" Unlike the other types of questions, mirror or spontaneous questions cannot be scripted beforehand. Rather, as you listen to your interview participant's responses, you might pose a question to follow up on something that was just said.

As you revise your questions, consider their sequence. For example, which questions to you want to ask first, to make your interviewee feel more comfortable? Do you want to ask the closed questions first, as you have specific informational goals that you want to meet? Or, do you want to begin with more open-ended questions?

Practice your questions with a classmate and make sure that you have the sequencing down.

Writing Your Interview Script & Informed Consent

Before you conduct your interview, your interview participant should have a good idea as to why you are meeting with them and what you are going to do with their information. You should go over your interview purpose and notify them about how you plan on using the interview results. You should also give them informed consent, allowing your interview participant to declare whether they want their identity to remain confidential and enabling them to withdraw from participation from the research at any time (please access the informed consent form in your Canvas course).

Draft a paragraph that will provide you with a script to present to your interview participant:

- What is the purpose of the interview? (You will have an academic purpose—you are conducting the interview to meet the obligations of ENGL 100—and a research purpose; that is, your particular interest in researching a community of which the participant is a member.)
- In general, what information are you interested in receiving from the interview participant?
- What will you do with this interview research? (you will include it in an ENGL 100 informative report that will be read by the course instructor and classmates)
- How long will the interview take?
- What format will the interview take?
- How will you record the interview notes?
- What will you do with the notes, either digitally recorded or written, after you have completed your research?
- How will you protect the interviewee’s privacy and confidentiality, if desired?

After you have completed your interview, make sure to email or text a follow-up “thank you” message.

Research Questions

Your interview questions enable you to explore your community and find out more about it. Your research questions, on the other hand, help you to find a main point of focus and to develop your community informative reports. These questions will help you to find secondary sources and/or help you generate interview questions to begin with. Your research questions may also allow you to reveal that point of significance.

Here are some examples of possible research questions:

- What are the typical demographics for this type of a group in other places in the United States?
- What role, if any, do such larger factors as gender, socioeconomic status, and race/ethnicity (as well as age, disability, etc.) play in this community and in how members interact with each other?
- What are some positive or negative consequences for what goes on in this community?
- What have been some major changes in this community? Why were these changes made?
- How “official” or “unofficial” is this community?
- What contradictions, if any, do you see between the goals and the practices of this community?
- What is something particularly interesting about the ways that members interact with each other?
- How do members go about learning in this community? How do they learn to be good “community members”?

You may find it difficult to come up with questions at the beginning, especially if you haven’t conducted any secondary research or your interview. That being said, once you start coming up with some rough research questions, you will be able to identify keywords that will help you out finding additional secondary sources.



Conducting Secondary Research

More than likely, you will have chosen a community to explore that is going to be specific and local. Therefore, you will rarely find any secondary research on the particular club, workplace, or organization that you are interested in.

What you need to do instead is to consider your research questions and the general type of community that you are interested in. You can then conduct a preliminary Google search to experiment with keywords (search terms) and to test what types of research exist.

For example, if you are interested in exploring your friend's Fantasy Football League, you can conduct research on the more general phenomenon of Fantasy Football in the United States. Given your interview results or your own gut reactions regarding Fantasy Football, you may want to make your search more specific by exploring some of the cultural and social aspects of Fantasy Football, including

- Gender
- The use of language or the ways in which Fantasy Football Owners interact with each other
- Age
- Culture

A Google search for "Fantasy Football Culture" results in some less formal blog posts and sports-related editorials, including

- "A Gentleman's Guide to Fantasy Football Trash Talk" (from an online site, *The Manual*)

- “Do We Take Fantasy Too Seriously? Highs and Lows of ‘Pretend’ Football” (from *Sports Illustrated* online)

These sources may be helpful in providing you more examples about cultural and social aspects of Fantasy Football, but they are probably too informal and fan-based to be useful for your report readers. These types of sources, though, may be useful to get you started, as you’ll get a feel for some of the conversations or issues that make up your community and you may learn more about the demographics of Fantasy Football Leagues (e.g., how many people play in them), information about when Fantasy Football became popular, and how much money is at stake in this industry.

K-State Library Catalogue

After you’ve experimented with search terms on Google or Google Scholar, then do a preliminary search on the Library Catalogue. You’ll find these sources, when searching for “Fantasy Football Culture,” that are easily accessible:

- *Monstrosities, Money, & Machines: A Metaphoric Analysis of Fantasy Football as a Social World* (a Ph.D. dissertation)
- *Fantasy Football: Analyzing Fantasy Themes in America’s Rhetorical Pastime* (a Ph.D. dissertation)
- “Social Networks, Football Fans, Fantasy and Reality” (article from *Journal of Information, Communication & Ethics in Society*)

These are all academic sources that will give you a much better sense of how researchers are looking at Fantasy Football as a cultural phenomenon.

K-State Library Database: ProQuest

Go to the K-State Library databases, which you can access by using a link under the catalogue search window. Go to the *ProQuest Research Library*. This time, if you change your search terms to “Fantasy Football Gender,” you start finding sources that might be interested in social identity and consumer behavior (click on “Peer reviewed” and “Full text” to make these research sources more credible and accessible):

- “Fantasy vs. Reality: Exploring the BIRGing and CORFing Behavior of Fantasy Football Participants” (*Sports Marketing Quarterly*)
- “Fantasy Sport Consumer Segmentation: An Investigation into the Differing Consumption Modes of Fantasy Football Participants” (*Sports Marketing Quarterly*)

- “The Effects of Fantasy Football Participation on Team Identification, Team Loyalty and NFL Fandom” (*Journal of Sports Media*)

As you begin to explore these sources, you start to come up with new ways to consider your local example of a Fantasy Football league and how it can reveal something interesting and relevant for your readers. For example, if you’ve never heard about “BIRG” and “CORF” before, you could start there.

You will also become aware of the recursive nature of secondary research. You may discover that after an initial research phase you then need to return to researching as you continue drafting. You may do some initial research, even before you have conducted your interview. You may find that, even after you have completed the results section, you will need to do more research to make more significant connections to your audience in the analysis section.

Among other possibilities, here are some purposes for research:

- **Stimulate** interest in your community and point of social significance
- **Provide** background for your reader about the community and the main point
- **Explain** why the community should interest them
- **Point** to a misconception that the reader and others may hold about the community
- **Show** points of agreement and/or disagreement with your primary research interview
- **Provide** additional or new information on points that were not answered or covered in the interview
- **Define** an important social or cultural concept that is related to your main point
- **Support** or complicate the main point you are trying to make about the community
- **Provide** data, details, and demographic information about the community
- **Show** examples of similar communities

Depending upon these purposes, you will find that research can occur in all three of the report sections:

Introduction	Results	Analysis
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show points of agreement and/or disagreement with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define an important social or cultural concept that is related to your main point

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulate interest in your community and point of social significance • Provide background for your reader about the community and the main point • Explain why the community should interest them • Point to a misconception that the reader and others may hold about the community 	<p>your primary research interview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide additional or new information on points that were not answered or covered in the interview • Provide data, details, and demographic information about the community • Show examples of similar communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support or complicate the main point you are trying to make about the community
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Organizing Primary and Secondary Research Results

Eventually, you should end up with several pages of primary (interview) data and secondary source research notes. What do you do with all of this material?

You should reread your notes carefully and start looking for patterns and themes. The bulk of your report will be the middle results section, which reflects the results of your primary and secondary research. Your main goal in this section is to organize according to several main meaningful “chunks,” themes, or points.

Researchers have many ways of doing this important step in sifting through their notes and finding patterns, including the following:

- **Searching for “hotspots,”** which are especially interesting moments that show up in your interview and secondary research notes; take down notes on these hotspots and consider how they will be interesting and relevant for your readers
- **Brainstorming and clustering,** activities in which you read your notes and start writing down thoughts and keywords and finding links between them

- **Freewriting**, in which you return to your research questions and begin to respond to them with your data and notes in mind (in this case, you are writing quickly to yourself)
- **Outlining**, in which you envision what the main categories are or the sections that you will use to guide your readers through this section
- **Identifying “gaps,”** places in your research about which you and your readers will want to know more

When writing up your results section, these are some questions that you can respond to:

- What are the main patterns, “hotspots,” or points from your research?
- What research questions have you explored?
- What meaningful chunks are the most important and relevant for your readers?
- What does your community insider say about the community that is important for your readers?
- What do your secondary research sources say?
- How can you synthesize your secondary research sources and your interview data?

When you are organizing your primary/secondary research notes, consider different ways of organizing your results section into two or more meaningful chunks; we can call these sub-sections, as they are smaller sections within the larger results section.

Here are several examples of what these sub-section headings will look like:

Example #1

Results

Interaction

Language

Learning

Roles

In this example, the writer is using the results section to explore the community and will be basing their results off of their observations and interview notes. They include four sub-sections, which will respond to these following research questions: How do people in the community interact with each other? What are the special terms that people use to communicate with each other? How do new community members learn to become “good” members? What are the different roles that make up this community?

Example #2

Results

*Interview Results**Secondary Research Results*

Here, the writer is organizing the results according to the two different types of sources that were used.

Example #3

Results

*Roles of Religion**Roles of Socializing & Alcohol**Roles of Academics**Roles of Sports & Athletics*

In this fraternity community example, the writer is focusing on four different “hot spots” that were coming out of the interview and secondary research.

Example #4

Results

*Local Community**National Community*

This simple organizational strategy allows the writer to focus first on the local community and then make connections to the same community but at a higher level or scale.

As you are working on your sub-headings, make sure you find a way to use typeface effects (ALL CAPS, bolding, centering, italics, etc.) to distinguish the major results heading from the sub-section headings.

Clarifying the Purpose of the Community Informative Report

Recall the overall purpose of the community informative report: you are exploring several research questions related to a particular community using primary and secondary research in order to inform a public or professional reader who should find the research significant. Yet, be careful about trying to address the purposes of “typical” research papers or arguments.

Take the example of a group, the local chapter of the National Rifle Association. The community informative report about this local group will differ a great deal from a typical research paper or argument because of differences in purpose, audience, and research focus.

Typical Informative or Argumentative Paper	Community Informative Report
Purpose: To take a side on gun control and find research positions that support this position.	Purpose: To explore the members of a local NRA chapter, examining perhaps how they interact with each other, with others outside of the group, and with other NRA groups.
Audience: The teacher and a vague audience of people who think a lot like the writer.	Audience: An audience that will find this research on a local NRA group interesting and important; for example, the faculty advisor for a campus anti-gun group.
Research Focus: The writer will search for sources that support a particular position on gun rights and the 2nd Amendment. A possible research question might be the following: "Why should we protect the gun rights of citizens in the United States?"	Research Focus: The writer will use information from an interview and secondary research on the NRA. A possible research question could be the following: "What are the demographics of the local NRA group? How do these demographics correlate with the political beliefs of the members?"

With a partner, talk through your own purpose, audience, and research focus.

Writing Your Introduction

In your introduction, you will be announcing your purpose (i.e., you intend to inform your audience about a community) and the community you have selected. You should also explain why this community is relevant and interesting for your audience. Finally, you will explain any background information or context that is important for your audience. You should explicitly tell your readers what your overall main point of your research is going to be. You may also want to tell them what to expect.

Below, you will see some examples for three of the core features of introductions: purpose, thesis (the main point of significance), and blueprint statement.

Purpose

The purpose focuses your readers immediately on your community and why you are researching this community.

Some examples:

- In this ethnography, I want to show how I've delved into the background and practices of Jenna Moreci's YouTube channel.
- The purpose of this paper is to interview one member of the Clovia House at K-State and analyze the ways in which this community suggests how young women should act.
- This community informative report analyzes the British Radio Five Live podcast, The Mark Kermode and Simon Mayo's Film Review, to figure out whether the listeners of this podcast can be considered as members of a community even though they may never interact with each other.

Thesis

The thesis tells the readers the overall main point of significance, which you will develop more fully in your analysis section. If your purpose statement tells the reader your overall goal for writing this report and the reason for why your audience is being asked to read it, your thesis provides the most important take-away point with which you want your readers to leave the report.

Some Examples:

- My findings indicate that this discourse community as an ideal informal learning space thanks to Moreci's use of language to engage and shock viewers along with her concise presentation of information.
- Readers might assume that women's cooperative organized living is like a "Build-a-Housewife Workshop"; however, my community report will show that Clovia's environment establishes professional skills for the workplace such as language, problem management, writing, and negotiation.
- As I explore more fully in the final section, in response to doubts from communication researchers, global online communities can exist even though they rely a great deal on passive readers or listeners.

As the last two examples showed, you can frame your thesis in terms of a misconception or an information need that your audience has:

- Many people in my audience know a little about X, but I can help them learn more.

- Many people in my audience have a misconception about X, but I can help to change their misconception.
- Many people in my audience don't see that X relates to them, but I can show how it does relate to their needs.

Blueprint Statements

Blueprint statements serve as “tables of content”; they forecast what is going to happen, and they can occur towards the end of introductions and at the beginning of the other two major sections. Below are four examples that format the blueprint statement differently.

Example A

In this community informative report, I first explore the interaction of the Child Center assistants, training rituals, and evaluation policies. I then explore, in the concluding section, the ways in which these three areas may influence employee turnover among these assistants.

Example B

This community informative report answers the following questions:

- What are the interaction styles, training rituals, and evaluation policies at the Child Center?
- How do these components affect the turnover of assistants?

Example C

In this analysis of the Child Center, I will do the following:

- Describe the interaction styles among assistants
- Identify the training rituals for new assistants
- Explore the evaluation policies

Afterwards, in the concluding section, I will show how these three elements increase the turnover of assistants.

Example D

This community informative report (a) explores the interaction of the Child Center assistants, (b) describes the training rituals of new assistants, and (c) identifies the significant evaluation policies. Finally, this report shows how those three elements impact assistant turnover.

Freewrite your responses to several of the questions below to help you build the introduction:

- What is your main purpose in this report?
- What community are you exploring?
- Whom are you interviewing and why have you chosen this person?
- How will this community be relevant and interesting for your readers?
- What important background or context does your reader need to know?
- What is your overall main point of significance?
- What should your readers expect?

As you work on your introduction, two strategies that you might want to consider are (a) locating a “mission statement” for the organization that is linked to your primary reader in order to highlight the values of your reader as a way to show how your community research is relevant and (b) finding a compelling statistic or fact about your community that shows how the community you are researching has recently changed (for example, if you are writing about a local 4H organization, you might want to point out how participation in this organization has decreased over the past decade).

Here is an example of an introduction from Katie Gehrt’s “Fantasy Football: A Discourse Community That Reinforces Male Privilege.” While reading Katie’s introduction, identify the ways that she

- Interests her audience
- Provides relevant background information
- Provides a misconception that readers might hold
- Guides readers through her major points
- Uses secondary sources
- Tells readers her overall purpose

With over one dozen phone apps available, social media accounts, sports analyst blogs, an entire DirecTV Fantasy Zone Network, and 74.7 million registered members in 2015, one may have a hard time believing that Fantasy Football, an electronic network for National Football League (NFL) football fans, has been around since 1962. The first Fantasy Football League, called the Greater Oakland Professional Pigskin Prognosticators League (GOPPPL), had its first draft in 1963, marking the first official season that Fantasy Football took place (Brown). This interesting

discourse community serves as an opportunity for individuals to build, manage, and coach their own “dream” team, all while competing against other teams coached by friends, coworkers, or even strangers. Each league member has the same goal: to have the winningest record over the course of the season, and therefore win the League. Depending on the league one is participating in, success could be measured in monetary winnings, or for a sense of personal satisfaction and bragging rights.

When many people think of Fantasy Football, often times they do not consider it a community that exchanges much literacy; however, without it, this community would not be able to function or expand as it has in the past decade. Although the level of communication between members varies in every league, the rules and regulations designed by each League Commissioner are significant in determining scoring, what an acceptable trade is composed of, and the style of draft used prior to the start of the NFL season. One of the most important qualifying components of a discourse community is the lexis used within the community and within the genres used by the members of the specific community. These are arguably two of the most significant aspects of Fantasy Football; to participate, one must have an understanding of the terms and systems in place to operate a team. Furthermore, if one were to be successful in a League, this terminology becomes even more crucial. While the specialized lexis used is one of the most compelling reasons to study Fantasy Football leagues as a discourse community, it also serves as a deterrent in encouraging outside parties and new members to participate, especially women. Women only make up 20% of Fantasy Football League owners, and the discrepancy between men and women only continues to grow when evaluating the types of leagues that each participate in. Many women choose not to join a league at all, or opt for a less traditional approach and play weekly Fantasy challenges through programs like FanDuel (Rubin). These non-traditional leagues require less of a time commitment and overall knowledge about football because it takes place over the course of one week as opposed to thirteen weeks in a traditional league. A few studies have been done to examine the role of male privilege in Fantasy Leagues and how sports knowledge operates as way to perpetuate male privilege. Through this mini-ethnography, I will explain the substantial characteristics of Fantasy Football within the league that I participate in by focusing on how these characteristics qualify it as a discourse community and examine the role that male privilege has on the participation of women in traditional leagues.

Coming Up With Significance

The research that you develop and organize in the results section should be building up to an important point about how the community reveals something interesting and important about society and culture for your readers.

In the results section, you have described the community for your readers and you have provided some interesting insights about this group. Now, examine these main points that you have identified and come up with an overarching theme that is relevant for your audience: this point of significance may interest them and, conversely, may trouble them.

Your earlier class discussions about gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic class/status may be useful at this stage to shape a larger point about significance. Your research questions may also be leading you to this point of significance.

For example, while Julian E. Orr was conducting an ethnographic study on a community of photocopy machine repair specialists, he came across a significant point about how these specialists actually learn. In a 1990 article, “Sharing Knowledge, Celebrating Identity: Community Memory in a Service Culture,” Orr concluded that these specialists do not learn from textbooks or classroom lectures, but from a social community of their photocopy machine specialist peers who tell each other stories. In this case, the point of significance was one about learning.

Similarly, other ethnographers have been interested in finding out what is significant about the ways in which certain communities “apprentice” newcomers—that is, what are the mechanisms in place to train these new members? In a classroom setting, for example, researchers have looked at how policies, such as those that allowed new students to get comfortable for several weeks before they were asked to speak and participate, ended up enhancing the participation for women and other groups of students.

A few stock questions that may lead to a point about social and cultural significance:

- Is this community in a conflict with other communities? If so, is there a cultural or social cause for this conflict?
- Is there anything striking about the demographics of this community?
- Is there a particular political orientation that members of this community hold?
- In the past, has there been a change in this community that is important when it comes to social and cultural issues?
- Is there an issue or conversation that divides members of the community (or that separates them from members of other communities)?
- Is there a way that members interact with each other in this community that they would not in other communities or settings?
- Are there any internal contradictions in this community?

You should also keep on considering your audience and how they will respond to the information you are presenting them about this community. What will surprise them? What is a misconception about the group that you are perhaps clearing up?

Writing Your Analysis

After you have explored the Coming Up with Significance section above, you can then work on your analysis, in which you develop the significance of your primary and secondary research. In the results section, you provided your readers with a lot of information and points about the community. In the analysis, you now have a final opportunity to explain how they should think about this research and what they can do with it. Note: There are several options for naming this final section. You might also consider using “Discussion,” which is typical of social science reports, or “Significance” as your major section heading.

You should not introduce new research and material in this section, yet you can pose questions and get your audience thinking about future research questions. You should continue to think about your audience and what they might find surprising in your research from the results section. If you use secondary research in the analysis section, you should do so as a way to develop and extend the significance of your findings.

As your analysis explores the “main point” of your informative report, you’ll want to make sure that you tie it back to your introduction and results section.

Here are a few questions that you can freewrite on. You should also use the significance questions above.

- What is the most important point that is coming out of your results section?
- What point is going to surprise your readers the most? Why?
- What’s a misconception about your community that your readers may have held before? How should their position now change?
- What is significant about this community in terms of culture and society?
- How can the results be helpful for your readers in thinking about the community or making decisions?

Consider this template as one strategy for developing your analysis section:

- First paragraph: Summarize your main findings from the results section, perhaps by using a bulleted list. Include a take-away point for each of your sub-sections from the results.
- Following paragraphs: Develop one overall point that helps connect the points that you clarified in the previous paragraph. Or, develop at least one of these major findings and

point out why it's interesting, important, and/or significant for your readers. In short, why should your readers care about this main point?

- Concluding paragraph: Emphasize your overall main point, and leave your reader with a good overall impression of yourself as a researcher and writer. You can also offer a gentle recommendation. Given the findings from your results section, how should your readers reconsider their thinking about this community or what changes in their own organizations should they consider making?

Here is an example of an analysis from Katie Gehrt's "Fantasy Football" report. While you are reading it, focus on the ways that Katie is extending and developing points that she already divulged in her Results section.

Analysis: How Fantasy Football Reinforces Male Privilege

Although the intercommunication, genres, and lexis are important in qualifying Fantasy Football as a discourse community, research has shown that they can also be a huge deterrent in encouraging outside party participation, particularly women. One of the most fundamental ways that Fantasy leagues do this is through the sport itself; there are no current Fantasy leagues for any female sports. In addition, the competitive aspect of Fantasy and the genres used reinforce male privilege and fortify masculinity through communication between members and the names that are frequently used for female teams.

According to Davis and Duncan in "Sports Knowledge is Power: Reinforcing Masculine Privilege through Fantasy Sport League Participation," fantasy leagues reinforce hegemonic heterosexual gender roles through the competition of league members and utilizing sports knowledge as a power mechanism over others. My own research supported this idea, especially when evaluating the lexis that is needed in this community and how it bars women from obtaining the same knowledge and participation. Statistics reveal that if women participate in Fantasy leagues, they are more likely to opt for non-traditional leagues that typically span one week because they require less knowledge of statistics and sports news. This research supports the theory that sports knowledge provides individuals, particularly men, with a sense of power because they can use this as a way of leveraging their control over others. In turn, this knowledge gained by males creates a large barrier that prohibits women from feeling as if they would know enough to participate and creates a fear that if they were to join, they would be ridiculed for not participating "well enough."

One of the other ways that Fantasy Football discourages female participation is through the message board and communication between members; like through the use of lexis, it is interesting that one of the major genres and qualifying factors of this discourse community also serves as a way of making the league participation more exclusive. Through their study, Davis and Duncan concluded that:

Competition arises as another important mode of fortifying masculinity through sport participation. Analysis of fantasy football league message boards as well as focus group responses indicated competition as an important component of the masculinization of fantasy sport participation. Competition fosters an ideology of male supremacy by allowing men to celebrate their masculinity through verbal acts of aggression, emphasizing power and strength.

The language within message boards and intercommunication between male members have also contributed to the male privilege within fantasy leagues by promoting competitive language that reinforces the gender roles of males being more dominant and aggressive through competition, whereas women are not; one of the interesting pieces of research that I found was when I searched the names available and suggested for female Fantasy owners. Oftentimes, names that Fantasy owners choose reflect members of their team and serve as another outlet for intercommunication, as members will often suggest ideas of clever names for the upcoming season. Some of the popular suggestions for female teams were things such as, "Hair, Makeup, and Wins, Brees between my knees, Back that pass up, and Cleats and Cleavage." These names themselves suggest that women are incapable of contributing to the competitive nature of Fantasy leagues without subjecting themselves to names that are offensive and degrading; furthermore, each name is sexualized and reinforces gender roles. In the study conducted by Davis and Duncan, they found that males reported feeling uneasy and felt that their masculinity was challenged by women that took Fantasy sports seriously. In other words, women who did not conform to the sexualized heterosexual gender roles and perhaps choose a hyper-sexualized name were considered a challenge and were not regarded positively by the men in the study. Fortunately, the leagues I have participated in have not outwardly demonstrated oppression to me in this way, but for other women that attempt to compete in male-dominant leagues experience this discrimination and oppression often through genres such as the Message Board and the resources available for individuals searching for a team name.

Another unique aspect of the research that I came across was the analysis of women that participate in traditional leagues and why women make up such a low percentage of all owners. One researcher suggested that women participants act as a placeholder when there are not enough male participants (Christ). This fact was especially interesting to me because in one of the leagues I compete in, I was asked last minute to join because there were not enough participants to form a complete league. In the same evening that I was asked to play, I was expected to draft without conducting any personal research on players that I was interested in drafting, therefore causing me to be at a disadvantage from the start. This idea of "placeholder" participation is especially damaging because the males that do not serve as a placeholder have an advantage within the league and can exercise that advantage in a way that exacerbates privilege. Furthermore, the research suggests that low female participation is not due to lack of resources or accessibility to the important literacy genres; it is mostly due to the reinforcement of gender roles that bar women from being capable of being knowledgeable about sports.

In conclusion, the research I conducted through this ethnography suggests that there are many important literacy devices that qualify Fantasy Football as a discourse community, but these devices oftentimes suppress female participation and perpetuate the male privilege that already

exists within professional sports. The specific terminology necessary to be successful is often used as a power mechanism by male participants and in turn causes females to hesitate participating in traditional leagues for fear that their knowledge of statistics is not adequate enough. In addition, research suggests that females do not fail to participate because of accessibility problems, but that often times females who choose to participate in leagues act as placeholders when men cannot compete. Furthermore, the genres used between members, such as the message board within the ESPN Fantasy App creates an environment of extreme competition which fortifies the masculinity that Fantasy sports emphasize and value; in many studies, men reported feeling as if their masculinity was challenged by women that took Fantasy sports seriously. Finally, the research conducted through this ethnography suggests that although Fantasy Football qualifies as a unique discourse community with many forms of literacy, the specific genres and resources available are designed to benefit, attract, and retain male participants rather than women, which is one major way why women only make up 20% of all Fantasy owners.

Writing Your Abstract

Your abstract provides a synopsis of your community informative report; readers should be able to scan your abstract quickly to determine whether it will be useful for them. Your abstract should be approximately 100-200 words long, and it should focus on the important keywords that make up your study and that were used in your research process.

Your abstract should include a one-sentence summary of each of the sections of your report, including the following:

- Your overall social issue, research question, context, or community
- Your intervention—your research purpose, participant, and methodology
- Your most important findings
- Your most important points of significance and, if applicable, recommendations

Here is an example of an abstract from Benjamin DeZube's "The Misconceptions Behind Being a Division I Football Player":

Abstract

This community informative report explores the misconceptions that the audience and general public may hold about the life of college-level football players. Through secondary research and an interview with a first-year Division I college football player, this report focuses on the intense training schedule, the isolation that some players may feel, and the emotional struggles that some players may experience. This report then expands upon the interconnection between masculinity and the inability of many college-level football players to express their emotional

concerns to their teammates and coaches. Finally, this report emphasizes the importance of providing psychological services for football players.



Examining Student Examples

Read the following student examples to provide you with ideas about how to respond to the assignment. As you read, take notes on the following:

- Something that you find to be effective that you would want to emphasize to the writer
- Something that helps you understand the assignment better
- Something that you might try to emulate yourself in your report

Before sharing your responses with classmates, figure out the following core elements of the community informative report:

- What was the community that was researched?
- Who were the interview participants, and what role did they play in the report?
- Who was the intended audience, and why would they be interested in this community and this research?
- What were some research questions that the writer responded to?
- What was the point of significance?

Student Examples

Men, Women, and Cars: A Mini Ethnography of the Topeka Car Meet Community

Lauren Ailsieger

Note: The intended audience for this informative report is the Head of the Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies Department at Kansas State University.

Introduction

To a passerby, it is just another night in downtown Topeka. There is a little extra traffic, but for 8 pm, it is relatively quiet. During the weekday, downtown is normally full of the hustle and bustle of government workers and other white-collar jobs. But on Saturday night, 8th Street becomes the stomping ground for one of the largest car meets in the area.

The Ronin Garage is just another one of the many parking garages in downtown. It has a beautiful view of the capital building and the locally famous Jayhawk Tower, while still being quietly tucked away between a bank and a bar. By 8:30p.m., there is a consistent flow of traffic into the garage. A young man stands at the entrance with a clipboard and pen to track every car and owner that comes into the garage. Parking is free on Saturday nights, but with the magnitude of the event, it is necessary to have a system to control the chaos.

There are six levels to the garage, and by 9:15p.m., all six levels are filled with cars. A haze of smoke settles over the middle levels from exhaust, coupled with cigarette smoke and vape. For the next several hours, hundreds of people in dark hoodies trek up and down the dimly lit garage looking at the cars.

For a new-comer, this event can be intimidating, with anywhere from 200-800 people at any given meet, all with vast amounts of knowledge. But to the seasoned veteran, it is a family gathering. Moms push baby strollers beside their husbands, small children run from car to car, and even family dogs are included.

This has not always been how car enthusiasts of the greater Topeka community came together. In fact, a variety of car meets happen in parking lots across Topeka every Friday and Saturday night. The locations are constantly changing but members of the car community always know where to go. These specific meets at the Ronin Garage started as a branch of the more typical meets. Two teen-aged friends, Tyler Russell and Ellis Donaldson, decided that going to a parking garage would be more fun than just sitting in a parking lot on the main road. So Russell and

Donaldson, along with five or six of their friends, started going to the parking garage on Saturday nights instead of the usual “Vintage Stock” parking lot. After a few weeks, they made a Facebook event. By the third formal meet, over 800 people indicated on Facebook that they would attend. Now, these specific garage meets occur about once a month.

The purpose of this ethnography is to examine the interaction of the enthusiasts that come to these meets. It is, by far, the largest informal meeting of car enthusiasts in Topeka, and a look at the specific set of people that attend the Ronin Garage meets may give greater insight into the larger car scene as a whole. These events are a rare time when “outsiders,” like myself, can pull back the curtain to a community that is mostly underground.

This report will explore the linguistic patterns and lexicon unique to this community and how gender plays into the interaction among members. My research will show that while these meets maintain a level of exclusivity, there are underlying values that maintain the legitimacy and value of the car community as a whole, specifically in relation to hard work and gender.

Results

The people who typically come to these meets are primarily white males in their late teens and early twenties. There is a smaller population of Hispanic individuals in that same age bracket, and finally about 6% of the group identifies with some other racial category. Only about 15% of the individuals are female. This gender disparity will be expanded on in a subsection of this results section, as well as in the final section.

The Language

While anyone can attend one of these meets, there is a specific lexicon used by members of the “car scene.” Some of these words are fairly self-explanatory, while others make no sense to one not well-versed in the car vocabulary. Some of the most common terms are in regard to the speed of a car. Generally, the faster the car, the better. For instance, a “ricer” is a person who builds his or her car to look cool or fast, when in reality, it is slow. A “sleeper” is a car that looks slow or average but is in fact fast. The last common term is “stock,” which refers to a car that has had no alterations from its original composition.

The more familiar one is with the slang, the more he or she will understand when speaking with car owners and other enthusiasts. Most of the people at this particular meet are concerned with speed. Conversations between members usually involve speaking about alterations one can make to the car to increase the speed. Terms related to enhancing speed include “turbo” and “supercharger” as well as words that specifically refer to the engine size, e.g. cylinders (“V6,” for example). The turbo and supercharger are both modifications that will increase speed, while the engine size stays more or less the same.

The final aspect of language that is particularly important to members of the car scene, at least when it comes to speed, is it is better for the car owner to have built or modified the car to be fast, than to have paid for a car that is already fast. Since the idea of building one's own car is so important, the terminology is that much more important. So, the more an individual has modified his car, the more familiar he will be with the vocabulary, the more he will be included in conversation, and the "better" the member will be (Buchanan 2018). One of the fastest ways a new-comer can draw attention to themselves is by not understanding the terminology used.

Gender, Cars, and the Working Class

There is no argument that one gender tends to dominate these meets. Just walking around, observers will clearly see that men outnumber women both in sheer numbers but also when it comes to knowledge and involvement in the community. But in a world that seems to be equalizing the playing fields of gender roles, why is it that the car scene has such disparity in the representation?

Boys Only

Building and modifying cars has always been a primarily male activity. When one thinks of "hot-rod" cars, the image of the teen-aged boys of the 60's and 70's often comes to mind. Working on cars and racing has never been one of the typical roles for females. Whether this divide is intentional or not is less important than the fact that now the role women are playing in car culture is growing. However, as Karen Lumsden points out in "Gendered Performances in Male-dominated Subculture," the involvement of women in subcultures such as the car and racing scene is highly undocumented.

There has been much research done about cars and masculinity but what about the women? I asked a member of this car meet community about the gender divide: "Guys outnumber girls because a lot of people connect with others that already know about cars [generally men] instead of taking time to teach others. So, it's difficult for girls to learn or come in without another source to share their knowledge" (Buchanan, 2018). This particular car meet allows for learning on all fronts, but, as mentioned in the language section, if one does not understand the terminology, it can be hard to engage in conversation with the seasoned enthusiasts. And since women are few and far between, they tend to not understand as much of the terminology or be as overall involved in the community, which, whether intentionally or not, increases the gender disparity.

Women and Cars

Aside from stereotypically having less car knowledge, women are often portrayed in mainstream media as sexual objects, especially in relation to cars. "In the movies, there's the guy with the cool car and a hot chick" (Buchanan, 2018). To a man, both the car and the woman have a sexual

appeal, but even when the woman is not being portrayed as an object, she still is often seen only as a passenger (Lumsden, 2010).

This is not to say that women cannot be the drivers or owners of the cars that appear at the garage meets, but it is a predominately male hobby. In all likelihood, a big factor is that tinkering with cars involves “dirty” and physical work. And while a woman could certainly be involved in, and enjoy, dirty and physical work, it is culturally less likely.

One significant issue with women getting involved in racing is the potential threat to masculinity. Since the car scene is mostly male, having a woman involved can cause some intimidation. This relates to how modifying cars offers up the “space in which to construct a form of hegemonic masculinity” (Lumsden, 2010). Cars have historically been an area that allowed men to express their masculinity. Females, typically, do not show the same masculine characteristics even when involved in the car scene. They are generally stereotyped as ignorant about cars and therefore, one could argue, will need to prove themselves. However, once they have proven themselves, the males tend to show overwhelming support for them: “Guys want girls to like cars and work on them [...] If a woman shows up to these meets, most guys are already impressed. And it’s a huge bonus if she knows anything about cars and double points if she drives something cool” (Russell, 2018). That being said, in order to prove themselves, women generally have to take on more masculine characteristics like “toughness, bravado, competitiveness, and aggression” in order to conform to the community (Lumsden, 2010). This in turn, ends up protecting the masculinity while diminishing the femininity of the community.

Working Class Men and Their Cars

As mentioned previously, there is a prejudice against cars that were bought fast versus cars that were modified to be fast. Additionally, car modification is seen as dirty manual labor. It is a common stereotype or misconception that the members of this car community are lower or working-class individuals. While some individuals do identify in those class ranges, many of the individuals at these meets are actually members of the middle and upper-middle-class.

The reason that car culture is so closely associated to the working class goes back to age-old values of “honest work” and the quest for masculinity (Walker, 1998). Specifically, what seems to be the most important to the Ronin Garage meet community is manufactured speed. This idea of hard work and speed helps identify some key male characteristics: the adrenaline rush of going fast, the risk of illegal racing, and the competition—both within racing and in the appearances and modifications of the cars. These masculine working-class traits add to the gender divide at these meets.

Discussion

At the core of these meets that take place at the Ronin Parking Garage on 8th Street in Topeka is a set of values. These values determine how the members even become members as well as

their interaction. The first obvious value is that of hard work. This idea of hard and honest work is typically a working-class value. That is not to say, however, that these meets are exclusively about socioeconomic class. In fact, most of the participants are probably completely unaware of the social classification of one another. It is not about the social standing of any one individual, it is about “respect for the people around you” (Donaldson, 2018). Respect is the greatest underlying value of this community. I conducted three separate interviews while conducting my research and each individual emphasized the importance of respect. Since the entire car scene is mostly underground, there are no written rules or code of conduct. However, the rules are common knowledge among members and they focus around that one value: respect.

To achieve this ideal value of respect, the community follows an egalitarian school of thought. According to my interviewees, everyone is welcomed at these meets, and everyone deserves to be respected. This plays into a lot of the bigger rules such as no excessive noise or “trash talking” others’ cars.

Of course, competition also plays a huge role in the car culture. Linley Walker from the department of sociology at the University of West Sydney discusses these aspects in her research, “Under the Bonnet: Car Culture, Technological Dominance and Young Men of the Working Class.” The individual inequalities begin to represent superiority of the “natural over artificial, that is, the social” (Walker, 1998). The car scene allows individuals to combine “the physical (bodily power and fitness), intellectual (mental agility in seeing and predicting the combination of road, car and danger, i.e. other drivers or police whilst driving at very high speeds), and psychological (the courage to take risks and the determination to win)” (Walker, 1998). These traits are typically considered to be lacking in women, which would explain why a woman would feel out of place at one of these car meets. And lacking these traits, according to Walker’s explanation, links them to the artificial and therefore inferior. Nevertheless, as already mentioned and stated by each of the interviewees, women are wanted in the car scene.

While clearly male-dominated, the car culture changes with the greater culture around it. Although historically women were seen as inferior, that perception has changed in society at large and as society progresses, so does the car scene, even if at a slower rate. That being said, women still must take on the traits of the members of this car subculture. That means wearing a similar style of clothes, maintaining a similar lexicon, and continuing to express the desire for car improvement and competition. But even if a woman achieves all of those, if she disrespects the venue, the members, or the cars in any way, she will be asked to leave just as a man would. This is one aspect of the rules that is universal. One must show respect and be respected or he or she will not fit in with this community.

Finally, this community and its values of hard work and respect are helping prolong the existence of the historical car community. Contrary to recent research conducted by National Public Radio, which revealed the decline of the importance of car culture and involvement in Southern California, the garage meets that occur in Topeka are living proof that the car scene, while underground, is here to stay (Glinton, 2013). What will be interesting to watch is the level of

involvement of women in the community. Will more women be joining the men? Will women begin modifying their own cars? Or will they continue to remain primarily a passenger in a man's world?

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The Misconceptions Behind Being a Division 1 Football Player

Benjamin DeZube

Benjamin DeZube wrote this community informative report in Jacque Boucher's Expos 1 class. The intended audience are psychologists in the Sport Science Institute of the NCAA.

Introduction

The dream of countless high school football players is to play at the next level at a top Division 1 school. The light, the cameras, and all the attention: it seems too good to be true. The community of this informative report, a Midwestern university football team, has been a powerhouse in the NCAA for the last 50 years, has produced countless big names in the NFL, and has been a consistent competitor in bowl games.

While a lot of people believe this opportunity to be a dream come true, I felt skeptical about how fulfilling it really is. People often assume that these players have it all and would have no reason to be discontent with the opportunity they have received. College football is essentially an iceberg; people see the players on the field, but they really have no idea what goes on behind the scenes. People don't know how rigorous the life of college football player is. Balancing the workload of football, school, and social life at this level can be nearly impossible at this level and can take a toll on the mental health of an individual.

In this ethnography, I will show you what the life of a Division 1 football player really looks like. Many readers might assume that the life of a football player at such a high-level seems desirable; however, my community report will show that the men who play for football team are faced with a rigorous life that can take a toll on their body and mental health and are faced with an unrealistic gender norms that often stop them from reaching out when they need help. In this report, I will first explore the interaction and lifestyle of football players at a large university, then I will analyze how this can take a toll on their well-being. Finally, I will evaluate how the culmination of being a man and a football player may create a pressure to compress any mental health issues that they might be feeling.

Schedules of the Players

Spectators only see the success of the players on the field, but the life of a college football player can seem more like a job than any hobby. I had the opportunity to talk with Aaron Williams, a freshman football player. He explained the daily schedule of one of his weekdays. Football players usually get up around 5:30 and workout from 6:00-7:00. After this they had to class until 2:00. They then have practice until 6:30 and must meet with a tutor afterwards until 10:00. By this time, they must go to bed because they'll be waking up at the same time the next day. On Fridays, the trainers have the freshman go through their day of "hell." They are pushed physically to the point of exhaustion, and the trainers try to break them with excessive amounts of conditioning. Aaron explained that this is a day to see who really belongs in this program, and who does not. The time for any social life is miniscule, if nonexistent. On top of this, Aaron is on a meal plan where he is eating six meals a day. He has already put on twenty pounds since arriving at the university a mere three months ago. He explained that playing football here is not for the faint of heart and you must be fully committed to the sport. If you don't love every aspect of it, you will struggle. This point is reinforced by the Tight End Coach at the University of South Carolina, Zak Willis, who claims, "'Understand that it's a lot of work and most of it will be away from the spotlights and stadiums. You must go in with the attitude that your sport is paying for your education and it's a job—at the end of the day, it's even more than a full-time job! You can't just love the *idea* of playing, because you aren't going to make it on that alone'" (Mantick).

According to Aaron, four freshmen have already quit; three were on full scholarship. The lack of any social life and the constant movement can create a constant feeling of fatigue within these players, and for many, they begin to question whether they have made the correct decision.

However, these guys are football players; they are supposed to be the manliest of men; they would never share this with anyone. When I asked Aaron about whether he would reach out to anyone if he was ever struggling or feeling overwhelmed by this strenuous schedule, he immediately explained that he couldn't afford to look soft, and usually they're told to tough it out; after all, they are Division 1 football players.

Communication Between Players and Staff

Understanding the rigor of the packed schedule is just one obstacle that these players face. The communication and camaraderie between these players and coaches was something that I was especially interested about because that is something that is never publicized in any form of mainstream media. I played high school football, and the one part that will always stick out to me was the close bonds and friendships I formed over the course of the four years.

When asking Aaron about whether his experience in college was similar to this, he first talked about his experience from high school. His seemed very similar to mine; he grew up playing with the same kids and they were always so close. He said he always looked forward to practice because it would always be fun taking the field with his brothers. He then began talking to about his college experience. He explained that college football is nothing like high school in the sense of the brotherhoods and friendships you make. Aaron stated that, coming in as a walk-on, he felt overwhelmed by all the highly recruited athletes that were coming in from all parts of the country. Some of these highly recruited athletes arrive with huge egos, and Aaron noted that it was hard to really get close with any of them. We must also take into account that there are so many players currently rostered that Aaron still does not know everyone five months into being in the program.

"Once we step on the field, it's all business," Aaron says. "When you're playing with all these players, some of the best in the United States, it feels like it's every man for himself." Aaron explained that while coaches in high school would strive to get close to all their players, on the university team only one thing matters: winning. Aaron fortunately has become closer with some of his teammates throughout these last five months, but he says he still reaches out to his high school friends and teammates if he ever wants to talk.

Reaching Out for Help

In January, Washington State Quarterback Tyler Hilinski committed suicide in his apartment; he was going to be the starting quarterback the following fall. His teammate and friend, Luke Fault, spoke about the incident very soon after. "It should be talked about, and we should do something about it, I feel like at times we feel like we can't express our emotions because we're in a masculine sport and him being a quarterback, people look up to you as a leader. He felt like he really probably couldn't talk to anybody. We've got to change some of that stuff. We have to have resources and not have a stigma of people going to that" (Masisak). This quotation aligned

closely to what Aaron said about reaching out for help. The idea of being seen as weak or vulnerable scares a lot of these players.

David Mischoulon, a professor of psychiatry at Harvard University, offers his input: “There are certain societal expectations on men that they have to be strong and effective. It is a lot harder for man to deal with any illness, because they can’t play the role society expects of them... There is still a belief that they are signs of personal weakness. Men can more easily deal with high blood pressure, which won’t have the same degree of sympathy as with a mental illness” (Levine). Men do not talk about their emotions and resist going to therapy, as these attempts at seeking help do not measure up with their masculine codes (Levine).

Aaron explained that sometimes he struggles with fatigue, but he always attempts to push through it. In his mind, the making of a champion is being able to push through that adversity; seeking help would be seen as soft or an easy way out. It’s not just the athletes’ inability to reach out, the lack of resources also plays a key role in this process. Chris Carr points this out when he notes that big NCAA schools are maximizing the number of physical trainers, physicians, and dieticians, but they seem to lack any psychologists for their athletes. This could make them much more accessible to athletes and not force them to hassle with counseling services through the university (Carr). Aaron confirmed that he had no access to a psychologist dedicated to the football team, but that he doesn’t see that as a problem, as he most likely would never use these services.

Analysis

David Levine of the *U.S. News & World Report* says it best, “There’s an old truism that men take better care of their cars than their own health.” It’s true that men are most prone to holding their feelings within, and this can often put themselves at the highest risk of suicide. Combining this with the rigors of being a Division 1 football player, one can only imagine the stigma they face.

Kelly Mantick explains the non-stop schedule for these athletes and demonstrates how college football is a full-time job. The student athletes have hardly any time to rest or maintain a social life, two very important factors in having healthy mental health. Combining this strenuous schedule with having the stigma of being a male Division 1 football player at a NCAA powerhouse can make it exceptionally tough. Masisak’s article about Tyler Hilinski showed how deadly it can be. It’s not like Hilinski was some player lost in the background who was never going to make any impact; he was going to start for a Washington State team that is currently eighth in the country. Levine’s argument in his article aligns with this point as he explains that men tend to push down these feelings and refuse to seek any help because they want to maintain “mental toughness.” This seems to be what Tyler Hilinski struggled with. When players feel depressed and they are stuck in these roles as male Division 1 football players, they can feel trapped, and evidently and unfortunately, the only escape Hilinski saw was suicide.

If Hilinski had someone that just would've kept tabs on his mental health, he still might be alive today. Carr points this out in his article about mental health in college athletes. He notes that a team psychologist could give athletes a much easier resource than seeking campus services. This resource could also take away the shame of sharing their struggles with someone else and getting help. However, it has gotten a lot better. Huge masculine icons such as Dwayne Johnson and NBA player Demar DeRozan have been coming out publicly about their bouts of depression, and this is a huge step in the right direction. These public revelations could help show these athletes that they are not alone and that it really is okay to get help. Who knows how many athletes at big schools are struggling with mental illness and how much help they could receive if only we could, as a society, continue to diminish this stigma of both males and college athletes being "mentally tough" and not needing help while also providing more resources for athletes to reach out?

Conclusion

Being a football player for a Division 1 program is daunting; it is a true commitment, and these athletes should now know how much they are sacrificing before they commit. This full-time job along with school can put a huge amount of strain on these players that may require help. While they are provided countless tutors, physical trainers, and dieticians, mental health should be prioritized in the same boat as these other necessities for athletes. If these athletes are given the proper resources that help diminish the stigma of being seen as weak, they will be much safer, and their mental health will be much more stable. This connection to psychological services will allow them to focus more on what happens on the field rather than hiding what they're feeling off the field.

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Strength and Impact of Community Factors on Graduate Students in the Kansas State University Master of Accountancy Program

Hannah Schneider

Hannah Schneider wrote this community informative report in Mawi Sonna's Expos 1 class. Her intended audience is Megan Miller, the Student Success Coordinator for the Kansas State University Graduate School.

Abstract

This Community Informative Report will review the factors of community in the Kansas State University Master of Accountancy program and how they influence the overall success and happiness of the students. Interviews with Dr. Terry Mason, the director of the Master of Accountancy program and Anna Beyer, a graduate student in the program and Graduate Teaching Assistant will provide insight on the program as well as the K-State College of Business website. In addition, Monica Moore of Johns Hopkins University and Derek Attig of the College of Illinois explain the importance of community in graduate school. Throughout this article, it will be shown that the classes and environment of the Master of Accountancy program promote community and bonding among students, which ultimately increases the happiness of the students and allows them to feel well-prepared to begin their careers. Additionally, an increase in orientation and bonding events for graduate students at the start of the program would allow for connections to be made earlier and further improve the community effects.

Introduction

While no two college adventures are the same, community is a beneficial and important part of any college experience. This report will explore the Master of Accountancy program at Kansas State University and evaluate its community qualities and how they affect students in the program. Interviews with Dr. Terry Mason, the director of the Master of Accountancy program, and Anna Beyer, a graduate student in the program, as well as information from the College of Business website will provide insight into the community and its properties. This information is beneficial to anyone connected to the Master of Accountancy program and anyone considering a Master of Accountancy degree. This information could also potentially benefit employers, allowing them to further understand the program. As a complement to these interviews, Derek Attig of the College of Illinois and Monica Moore of Johns Hopkins University, explain why a feeling of community among graduate students is important, which is relevant information to any graduate student as well as anyone that is responsible for bolstering community for a graduate college. Throughout this paper, it will be shown that the Master of Accountancy program encourages students to connect and teaches them to work collaboratively, which

allows for students to help each other grow and increases their happiness. It is also recommended that more opportunities at the beginning of the program should be implemented to allow for connections among the students to be sooner, which is supported by both Anna Beyer and Monica Moore.

Results

Common Interests and Goals

It is no surprise that students and faculty within the Master of Accountancy program at K-State, which is most commonly referred to as the MAcc, all share an interest in accounting. What makes the MAcc special as opposed to a bachelor's degree, however, is the deeper accounting knowledge, ability to take the CPA exam (which stands for Certified Public Accountants), and the sense of community among the students. In an interview with Dr. Terry Mason, the director of the MAcc program, he describes the completion of 150 credit hours and the ability to sit for the CPA exam as unifying goals among students, also stating that students often reach out to each other to study, which allows the students to bond. Dr. Mason even claimed that "you'll definitely make life-long friends within the MAcc" and have opportunities for "career-changing networking." In another interview with Anna Beyer, a student in the MAcc program and Graduate Teaching Assistant, she elaborates on the environment the MAcc program creates, stating that the more targeted classes allow for you to get to know a lot of your classmates better since many have similar schedules. In the interview, Anna also says: "I have better relationships with my peers," and that "we are all so close." Anna later explains the program's unifying properties, elaborating that "in the MAcc, you're all striving for the same thing with the same goal" and are "all striving to help each other achieve that goal" where the goal is obtaining a master's degree and passing the CPA exam.

Monica Moore, the Assistant Dean of the Carey Business School at Johns Hopkins University, discusses the benefits that a community creates for graduate students in her article, "Creating Community for Graduate Students (Part 1)." Moore encourages universities to not "consider graduate students as outliers and to intentionally program events and efforts to bolster their sense of community" due to its connection to student satisfaction. Moore also acknowledges the assumption of many colleges that graduate students are too busy to attend orientation-related activities and challenges this stating that this assumption is false and that "graduate students want to network and build social and professional communities" (Moore). This realization aligns with the interview of Anna Beyer, in which she stated that more social events, especially at the beginning of the MAcc program, would improve the sense of community among the MAcc students and also be helpful in integrating the students who obtained their undergraduate degrees at other colleges. As mentioned by Dr. Mason, students can also give back to the program by joining another group called Advocats, which includes many students that already have jobs lined up that work to improve the department. Throughout these interviews, the MAcc program is shown to have unifying properties that are formed around common accounting interests and the goal of passing the CPA exam.

Curriculum

Part of what allows the MAcc to have a strong sense of community is the curriculum for a variety of reasons. Derek Attig, the Director for Career Development for the Graduate College of Illinois, lists two main reasons why community is important for graduate students in the article, “Grad School 101: Building Community in Graduate School.” First, Attig explains that building a strong community allows for many people to support students academically, professionally, and personally as they grow throughout graduate school as well as advocate for their success. Secondly, Attig suggests that having a wide variety of “friendly, healthy, supportive relationships within and outside the university” allows for students to have fulfilling lives as graduate students. In relation to building connections, Dr. Mason explains that while the classes are fairly rigorous, they are “more focused on teamwork and discussions” and that “students learn by discussing with each other” in “team-based exercises.” Both Dr. Mason and Anna Beyer acknowledge the strong focus on specialization as a benefit to the program. Dr. Mason recalls in his interview that “about five years ago, the curriculum was redone” and that there are now six tracks rather than one. This specialization allows even further for students to be grouped through similar interests, which is a unifying property of any group. In response to a question about the ability of the program to improve career-readiness, Anna states that she definitely feels an improvement “because [the MAcc] is so specialized” and also states: “I truly understand why we’re doing things.” It is clear through these descriptions that the MAcc program bolsters confidence within its students and allows students to feel prepared upon graduation. When asked about the values of the community, Dr. Mason listed “ethics, integrity,” and “professionalism” which are similar to the values given by Anna, which included “hard work, academic success, truly understanding accounting, and community.” All of these values suggest the future success of the student as well as some focus on the treatment of and interactions between people, which are all important in the foundation of an academic community. Anna also explains that being a GTA “is really fun” and that she is “constantly in communication with people,” which promotes community building and also cuts down on the isolation that many graduate students feel (as discussed later.)

Analysis

Creating a sense of community is an important element of any graduate school for a variety of reasons including an increased ability of students to network and advocate for each other, a sense of teamwork created, and the bonds formed between students and faculty that lead to increased happiness of the students. Monica Moore argues that people should create programs that focus on community building among graduate students, which agrees with the interview of Anna Beyer, in which she stated that more social events at the start of the MAcc would help make connections early on and also help to include students with undergraduate degrees from different colleges. Moore also challenges the idea that graduate students are not willing to give up time for orientation activities, but Anna’s suggestion of an increase in social events at the start of the program supplements this claim, demonstrating that graduate students do care about bonding with their peers. Finally, Moore addresses the isolation that many graduate students can feel while striving to keep up with the demanding requirements of being a graduate student and states that “a sense of community can be particularly important to the overall experience.” Moore’s call to universities to make community a priority amongst

graduate students includes an emphasis on the value of community to graduate students and a necessary increase in activities promoting connections.

Community can be important to build within graduate school, as previously shown by Moore, for a variety of reasons. Derek Attig provides two main arguments as to why community is important to graduate school. First, Attig claims that a strong community is crucial in providing a support system for students where they can advocate for each other and provide academic, professional, and personal support and encourage growth. This statement is similar to what Dr. Terry Mason, the director of the MAcc program, expressed in his interview, stating that the program provides many opportunities for career-changing networking and allows for strong bonds to be formed amongst the students. Secondly, Attig suggests having a wide variety of healthy relationships both within and outside of class. The design of the MAcc program, as described by Dr. Mason, connects students within the classroom and encourages the development of both professional and personal relationships, stating that the curriculum has a strong focus around teamwork and working collaboratively. According to the K-State College of Business Administration, the college features “small classes where interactions with professors and colleagues are encouraged.” This description includes half of the recommended relationships, and it is up to students to form relationships off campus to maintain a balanced lifestyle.

Conclusion

The purpose of this report is to dive into the K-State Master of Accountancy program and examine its qualities of community and how they impact the overall happiness and success of the students in the program. Through interviews with Dr. Terry Mason and Anna Beyer, it is shown that the community aspect of the MAcc program is impactful on its students, allows for long-lasting connections and support between peers, and contributes overall to the happiness of the students. To supplement these interviews, claims from Monica Moore, Derek Attig, and the College of Business are also included. Improvements could be made to connect the students earlier on in the program by increasing the amount of orientation activities at the start of the program, but overall, the MAcc program is a well-established community that is worth considering if students are entering the accounting field.

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Activity

Peer-Review Workshop

Use this form as you share your rough draft with your workshop partners. For the numerical responses, 1= "not sure"; 2 = "yes, but could improve with revisions"; 3 = "excellent."

Writer's Community & Intended Audience:

Writer's Question or Concern:

Introduction

Clear purpose statement?	1	2	3
Clear thesis statement?	1	2	3
Clear blueprint statement?	1	2	3
Connection to audience?	1	2	3

Suggest at least one revision suggestion.

Body/Results Section

Broken down into meaningful and manageable chunks?	1	2	3
Enough research for audience?	1	2	3
Responds to research questions?	1	2	3
Research adequately cited, integrated, and introduced?	1	2	3

Suggest at least one revision suggestion.

Analysis

Summarizes the main findings?	1	2	3
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Develops one main point?	1	2	3
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Shows significance for reader?	1	2	3
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Suggest at least one revision suggestion.

Editing Strategies

As you edit and proofread your community informative report, consider these following three strategies:

1. Specify your nouns and make your verbs more active

Search for vague nouns and weak verbs that might end up confusing your readers. Here is one example:

Having conducted research on homeschooled students, **it was discovered** that **there are** many motivations for homeschooled families for homeschooling their children. **This is** important when making policy recommendations for the government.

In this example, the main grammatical noun of the first sentence is “it,” and “this” is the noun of the second sentence. You’ll want to make sure that you are emphasizing your points and guiding your readers with far more concrete nouns. The main verbs are “was discovered” (a passive form), “are,” and “is.” Again, whenever possible, look for more active verbs that connect back to the nouns. One quick revision of the paragraph above could be the following:

Having conducted research on homeschooled students, researchers have identified several main reasons for why families homeschool their children. This finding can guide government policy recommendations.

The revision now focuses on “researchers” and “finding” as the main nouns of these two sentences, which are then connected to the active verbal forms of “have identified” and “can guide.” An added benefit is that there is no longer a dangling participle, which was one of the problems of having “it” serve as the main noun in the first example.

Search for these forms on your word processor and determine whether you can find a more concrete and active verb:

- There is (There was, There were, etc.)
- This/That is (This/That was)
- These/Those are (These/Those were)
- It is (It was)

2. Consider your level of formality

An informative report has a fairly high level of formality. Look for these following informal uses in your own reports:

You: In an informative report, you can certainly use “you” if you are referring directly to the intended reader: “As the CEO of a Fortune 500 company, you obviously are aware that...” However, when you are using “you” in a colloquial sense, when you are really referring to people in general, you can affect the formality of your writing. Here is one example of the informal use of “you”: “Employees at the company have many tasks; for example, on any given day, you might find yourself having to conduct data analyses, interact with customers on the telephone, and inspect social media settings. You might feel that you are actually working for several different divisions of the company all at once.” It would be more formal for the writer to substitute “employees” or “they” for these instances of “you.”

Word choice and clichés: There are certain words and phrases that signal more of an informal stance by the writer, including “I feel that,” “ok,” and “kinda.” You may also want to be mindful of the clichés that you use, which can also reduce the specificity of your points. For example, consider this sports metaphor: “Homeschooled parents can knock their children’s education out of the park if they consider online packages.”

Contractions: In more formal writing situations, many readers will prefer fewer contractions. So, look for instances of contractions in your report and consider writing out the full forms.

3. Avoid dropped quotations

Dropped quotations are those that appear without any introduction or background. They may startle or confuse your readers, as they are attempting to figure out what to do with the quotation.

Here is an example of a paragraph that includes two dropped quotations:

Home-schooling proponents downplay such responsibilities to community and values of inclusiveness, emphasizing instead the benefits of economic, legal, and political independence. “Home schoolers do not excessively depend on their villages, their communities and the state” for the educational needs of their children (Ray 88). “Parents are children’s foremost authority and first and best teachers. They, not Washington bureaucrats, should decide how and where their children are to be educated” (“Education—Home Schooling”).

Although the writer cites these sources, the readers will require more guidance about why these quotations are being used and how they connect back to the topic sentence.

In this revision, you’ll find the introductory frames to these quotations:

Home-schooling proponents downplay such responsibilities to community and values of inclusiveness, emphasizing instead the benefits of economic, legal, and political independence. **Brian Ray, proud of these families’ desires to remain independent of the government, states that home schoolers** “do not excessively depend on their villages, their communities and the state” for the educational needs of their children (88). **Ray privileges the autonomy of individual families, which provide children with a “coherent worldview” (90-94) and do not present financial burdens to the government (100-101). Gary Bauer’s American Values website underscores this conservative message of family independence:** “Parents are children’s foremost authority and first and best teachers. They, not Washington bureaucrats, should decide how and where their children are to be educated” (“Education—Home Schooling”).

Look for the places in which you include quotations and ascertain the degree to which you introduce, explain, and contextualize them for your readers.

Chapter 5

The Informative Report



Informative Report Assignment Description

What Will You Do?

This unit synthesizes and extends the research, analysis, and writing skills that you have been practicing throughout the semester. You will investigate a social problem, issue, or phenomenon related to race and ethnicity in the United States. Your purpose will be to inform a reader – a public official – who will find your research significant, interesting, and satisfying. By researching the causes and consequences of this issue, you allow your reader to understand the historical and institutional reasons for why this problem persists and better appreciate the consequences of the problem.

Your Informative Report will be 5–8 double-spaced pages and will be delivered, as many formal reports are, in extended memo format. You will need to address a public official, who should also have something at stake in the social problem that you are investigating. You must incorporate at least **five** credible sources that you find through independent research.

The purpose of an informative report is to synthesize information from several sources and present it in an informative and readable fashion. This type of writing is common in diverse settings, including businesses, non-profits, and governmental organizations. For example, Congress has an entire department, the Congressional Research Service (CRS), that it directs to gather knowledge prior to informational and policy-related hearings as well as when requested by individual representatives and senators.

Here is the first of many research tips in this unit: CRS reports are public information available to you through the library and are an excellent source of information for your own report. In rough terms, you will be doing exactly what the CRS does when directed to research a topic. You will assemble the best available sources and information. You will objectively summarize those sources and that information. Then you will synthesize your research and summaries into a single report containing what you have learned. As we work on developing strong research practices, we will discuss how to choose the best sources and how to provide the best, most reliable evidence to your audience.

Who Will Read Your Report?

At the heart of informative writing is the issue of audience: who needs to know the information you have found and why do they need to know it? For this assignment, you will be writing to a public official of your choice. You could write to officials at this university, local officials, state officials, or officials back in your hometown. You could write your congressperson, your senator, or the President of the United States. Each of these audiences requires different information, however.

For example, if you are writing to the President of Kansas State University, you might provide a synthesis of information on how race structures access to education. However, you have to think about what information is most useful to this particular reader. While national data might provide some insight, racial demographics vary between states, so you might look instead for more specific data to the state of Kansas. In general, you should always seek to tailor your information most specifically to the population you are addressing (i.e. state data for state officials, national data for federal officials). Additionally, you will want to consider what your target audience likely already knows and tailor your information to provide the most important and relevant information for that audience. You will also need to be attentive to how current your information is, making sure that you are providing the best information to support your reader's action. For example, while education segregation levels in Kansas in 1967 may be important information, it may not be especially relevant to the current President of Kansas State University in considering the role of race in present day college admissions in Kansas.

The reason we are writing to public officials is that, as your research in the causes of these racial and ethnic problems will show, these conversations about race and ethnicity in the United States are not accidental nor do they reflect actual or real differences between people of different races. Instead, the realities that we live in are the product of history and public policy. Because of this, the social problems and disparities that we research must necessarily be addressed, at least to a substantial degree, through public policy as well. Consider your research as the first step in attempting to solve these persistent social problems.

Objectives

By the end of this assignment, you should be able to do the following:

- Inform an audience about the causes and consequences of an issue or a problem related to race and ethnicity
- Narrow the scope of an issue to one that is manageable and researchable
- Identify an audience for whom the topic is relevant and significant, and be able to explain why this audience is interested in your findings
- Research the causes and consequences of the issue using appropriate and relevant sources
- Evaluate the appropriateness and credibility of your research sources
- Develop, synthesize, and demonstrate your understanding of source material accurately and usefully for your audience
- Develop your analysis of the source material directly to your audience's needs
- Integrate outside sources usefully for your audience
- Follow appropriate report format

- Apply the basic principles of MLA formatting and in-text citation (or another citation system of your choice) and construct a properly formatted MLA Works Cited page (or another citation system)

Rationale

This assignment relates directly to several of the Undergraduate Student Learning Outcomes at K-State, including knowledge, diversity, communication, and academic and professional integrity. Most importantly, this writing task asks you to pay attention to your readers and to figure out how your topic is significant to them. In English 200, as well as other classes that demand academic writing, you will be expected to write for different audiences, evaluate the credibility and suitability of research sources, and find effective ways to organize and integrate these sources. Moreover, researching the causes and consequences of a problem is an important part of what researchers do in the social sciences, business, and other academic and professional disciplines. For example, in Leadership Studies, researchers are asked to investigate problems – in terms of both causes and effects – in order to help inform the solutions they may adapt.

Additionally, as an adult who may be thrust into conversations about race and ethnicity at your university or other communities, you need to be familiar with these debates about racial and ethnic differences and disparities, and you need to be aware of such concepts as “structural” or “institutional” racism. You are not expected to become a sociologist, critical race theorist, or social historian, yet you are expected to demonstrate your curiosity, flexibility, and open-mindedness as you investigate the causes and consequences of important social issues and problems. These are challenges that you will experience as a university student, a member of the public, and an employee or intern in a company or organization. Moreover, you will find that such “soft skills” as flexibility and open-mindedness will be demanded by future workplaces.



Writing about Race and Ethnicity

In the Visual Analysis unit, you learned about the distinction between biological sex and gender: as opposed to the biological reality of differences in sex (although these differences do not conform to a strict male/female binary), gender is a socially constructed category. Or, to quote

Simone de Beauvoir, “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.” Race, like gender, is a socially constructed category. Unlike gender, however, there is no equivalent of biological sex for race. While American society associates specific physical traits with different races (e.g., dark skin), our readings and your research in this unit will illustrate just how deceptive those associations can be. As biologists have shown, there is as much genetic diversity within any individual race as there is between races. Below, you see a postage stamp commemorating Charles Chesnutt, a major African American author from the turn of the twentieth century. As you may have noticed, Chesnutt’s skin is not dark at all. Were it not for the caption reading “Black Heritage,” it is entirely possible that many of you might have identified Chesnutt as white. While this single postage stamp only proves that there are many different skin colors within the racial category of “black,” this example also indicates just how fluid our categories can be.



Figure 1. Charles W. Chesnutt Stamp

Furthermore, those categories change over time, and even within individual lives. For example, the scholar Noel Ignatiev’s book *How the Irish Became White* traces how individuals of Irish descent were first viewed as a separate and inferior race before being accepted as part of a larger race categorized as “white.” Recent research by sociologists Aliya Saperstein and Andrew Penner uses the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth—which has followed about 12,000 Americans throughout their lives since the late 1970s—to show that how an individual is identified by race can shift within that individual’s lifetime. Because researchers in the Survey make note of the race of their interviewees, Saperstein and Penner noticed that some individuals were identified as members of different races at different times based on specific life events that occurred. For example, Saperstein and Penner noted that survey respondents were more likely to have their race labeled as black following the loss of a job or a stay in prison, even if, in previous surveys, they had been labeled as white. Saperstein and Penner concluded that stereotypes about the experiences and lives of people of different races change how we identify the races of other people (for Saperstein’s article on their findings, see pg. 232).

Consequently, as you approach conducting research about a problem that is related to race and ethnicity, you first need to think more deeply about what is meant by race. Throughout your life, you are often asked to fill out forms in which you identify yourself by race. Think back to how you filled out those forms. How did you know which racial box to check? How did you know whether you should identify as “white” or “black or African American” or “American Indian or Alaska Native” or “Asian” or “Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander” or “two or more races”? How would your conception of your own race have changed if you had had to choose between the categories on the 1890 census, where you were instructed to write “White,” “Black,” “Mulatto,” “Quadroon,” “Octoroon,” “Chinese,” “Japanese,” or “Indian”?

As even just the changing labels on the United States Census show, definitions of the concept of race change, as do understandings of who is a member of which race. Consequently, our working definition of race has to address that fluidity and incorporate it. To do this, we need to move from language that discusses race as a way of “being” to what such scholars Paula Moya and Hazel Markus call “doing race.” In other words, race is not something that you are, but rather something that you do and that is done to you.

Discussing Quotations Related to Race and Ethnicity

In this section, you will find quotations from prominent researchers who are attempting to move us away from thinking about race and ethnicity as “containers” that we can use to group together people’s physical, mental, and other characteristics to view race and ethnicity as concepts that show the active relationships among groups who may possess different levels of social power. As you begin to work on your informative reports, you will want to explore these social contexts – such as the US government and institutions like the education system – and the ways in which they act upon people and influence the ways they perform their racial identities and think about race and ethnicity.

Consequently, we need to think about how our individual racial “doing” exists within society. For instance, when you fill out the census form, you are making a racial self-identification; there is no one standing over you forcing you to choose a certain category in response to the question. However, that racial identification is only one part of a larger process, just as the census is only one place in which we identify ourselves racially or are identified racially by others.

As you read through the following quotations, use these stock questions to guide your notetaking:

- What is the overall takeaway that the researchers are emphasizing about race and ethnicity?
- How do these researchers’ main points differ from “commonsensical” or “traditional” ideas about race and ethnicity?
- How do these researchers’ points challenge your own thinking about race and ethnicity?
- How can you relate these researchers’ points to your own lives, experiences, and reading?
- How can you use these researchers’ takeaways when you are building your own informative report?

Quotations from Paula M. L. Moya and Hazel Rose Markus, “Doing Race: An Introduction”¹

- Contrary to what most people believe, race and ethnicity are not *things* that people *have* or *are*. Rather, they are *actions* that people *do*. Race and ethnicity are social, historical, and philosophical *processes* that people have done for hundreds of years and are still doing. They emerge through the social transformations that take place among different kinds of people, in a variety of institutional structures (e.g., schools, workplaces, government offices, courts, media), over time, across space, and in all kinds of situations. (4)
- **Race** is a doing—a dynamic set of historically derived and institutionalized ideas and practices that
 - sorts people into ethnic groups according to perceived physical and behavioral human characteristics that are often imagined to be negative, innate, and shared.
 - associates differential value, power, and privilege with these characteristics; establishes a hierarchy among the different groups; and confers opportunity accordingly.
 - emerges when groups are perceived to pose a threat (political, economic, or cultural) to each other’s worldview or way of life; and/or to justify the denigration and exploitation (past, current, or future) of other groups while exalting one’s own group to claim an innate privilege. (21)
- **Ethnicity** is a doing—a dynamic set of historically derived and institutionalized ideas and practices that
 - allows people to identify, or be identified, with groupings of people on the basis of presumed, and usually claimed, commonalities, including several of the following: language, history, nation or region of origin, customs, religion, names, physical appearance and/or ancestry group.
 - when claimed, confers a sense of belonging, pride and motivation.
 - can be a source of collective and individual identity. (22)
- In the course of our everyday social interactions, people in the United States collectively perpetuate sets of ideas and practices about what it means to be white, Latina/o, black, Asian American, or American Indian. Sometimes people actively and intentionally

¹ Moya, Paula M. L. & Hazel Rose Markus. “Doing Race: An Introduction.” *Doing Race: 21 Essays for the 21st Century*, W.W. Norton, 2010, pp. 1-102.

devalue and treat people associated with groups other than their own as if they are lesser or unequal. Very often, however, people do race unknowingly and unintentionally just by participating in a world that comes prearranged according to certain racial categories (Adams et al. 2008a). We can see the consequences of the fact that people have done (and continue to do) race everywhere we look. We can observe, for example, that even in states where there are substantial Latina/o or Asian populations, there are very few Latina/o or Asian newscasters and pundits. We can see the effects of race when committees in charge of awarding construction contracts, educational fellowships, prizes for essays or art works, or engineering competitions are entirely made up of white people or have only one committee member who is associated with a minority racial group. These are institutionalized patterns that reflect and perpetuate the inequality resulting from centuries of doing race. (25-26)

Quotations from Howard Winant and Michael Omi's *Racial Formation in the United States*.²

- There is a continuous temptation to think of race as an *essence*, as something fixed, concrete, and objective. And there is also an opposite temptation: to imagine race as a mere *illusion*, a purely ideological construct which some ideal non-racist social order would eliminate. It is necessary to challenge both these positions, to disrupt and reframe the rigid and bipolar manner in which they are posed and debated, and to transcend the presumably irreconcilable relationship between them.

The effort must be made to understand race as an unstable and “decentered” complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle. With this in mind, let us propose a definition: *race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies*. Although the concept of race invokes biologically based human characteristics (so-called “phenotypes”), selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process. In contrast to the other major distinction of this type, that of gender, there is no biological basis for distinguishing among human groups along the lines of race.⁶ Indeed, the categories employed to differentiate among human groups along racial lines reveal themselves, upon serious examination, to be at best imprecise, and at worst completely arbitrary. (54-55)

- We define *racial formation* as the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed. Our attempt to elaborate a theory of racial formation will proceed in two steps. First, we argue that racial formation is a process of historically situated *projects* in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized. Next we link racial formation to the evolution of hegemony, the way in which society is organized and ruled. Such an approach, we believe, can facilitate understanding of a whole range of contemporary controversies and dilemmas involving race, including the nature of racism the relationship of race to other forms of

² Winant, Howard, and Michael Omi. *Racial Formation in the United States*, Routledge, 1994.

differences, inequalities, and oppression such as sexism and nationalism, and the dilemmas of racial identity today. (55)

Quotations from Brown et al.'s "The Origins of Durable Racial Inequality."³

- Discussions of racial inequality commonly dwell on only one side of the color line. We talk about *black* poverty, *black* unemployment, *black* crime, and public policies for *blacks*. We rarely, however, talk about the gains whites receive from the troubles experienced by blacks. Only when the diverging fates of black and white Americans are considered together—within the same analytic framework—will it be possible to move beyond the current stale debate over how to transform the American color line.

In our view, the persistence of racial inequality stems from the long-term effects of labor market discrimination and institutional practices that have created cumulative inequalities by race. The result is a durable pattern of racial stratification. Whites have gained or *accumulated* opportunities, while African Americans and other racial groups have lost opportunities—they suffer from *disaccumulation* of the accoutrements of economic opportunity. Rather than investigating racial inequality by focusing on individual intentions and choices, we concentrate on the relationship between white accumulation and black and Latino disaccumulation. (22)

- Today's very large gap in median net worth between whites and African Americans is mostly due to the discrepancy in the value of the equity in their respective homes. Blacks experience more difficulty obtaining mortgage loans, and when they do purchase a house, it is usually worth less than a comparable white-owned home. White flight and residential segregation lower the value of black homes. As blacks move into a neighborhood, whites move out, fearing that property values will decline. As whites leave, the fear becomes a reality and housing prices decline. The refusal of white Americans to live in neighborhoods with more than 20 percent blacks means that white-owned housing is implicitly more highly valued than black-owned housing. Redlining completes the circle: banks refuse to underwrite mortgage loans, or they rate them as a higher risk. As a consequence, when black homeowners can get a loan, they pay higher interest rates for less valuable property. This results in disinvestment in black neighborhoods and translates into fewer amenities, abandoned buildings, and a lower property tax base. Because white communities do not suffer the consequences of residential disaccumulation, indeed they receive advantages denied to black homeowners; the value of their housing increases and they accumulate wealth. In this way interlocking patterns of racialized accumulation and disaccumulation *create* durable inequality. (23-24)

³ Brown, Michael K., Martin Carnoy, Elliott Currie, Troy Duster, David B. Oppenheimer, Marjorie M. Schultz, & David Wellman. *Whitewashing Race*, U of California P, 2003.

- Racial realists believe that the accumulation of wealth and power by white Americans over the past 360 years is irrelevant to current patterns of racial stratification, and the use of race-conscious remedies to redress past racial injustices is therefore unnecessary and unfair. As they see it, basing current policies on past practices is wallowing in the past. The main impediment to racial equality, they feel, is state-sponsored discrimination, and the civil rights movement put an end to that. Thus, past discrimination should not matter. Ironically, adherents of this point of view ignore a different form of state-sponsored racial inequality—the use of public policy to advantage whites. Racism is not simply a matter of legal segregation; it is also policies that favor whites. (25)

Quotations from Aliya Saperstein’s “Can Losing Your Job Make You Black?”⁴

- Although the changes in race that appeared to be caused by any given change in social position were small, all the life outcomes we examined, including college graduation, teen parenthood, and welfare reception, affected changes in racial classification. Moreover, a cascade of woeful events could add up to a notable alteration in someone’s “race.” Take a hypothetical 29-year-old father of two who was classified as white by an interviewer. If he spent time before the next interview in jail, became unemployed, got divorced, and fell into poverty, his likelihood of being seen by an interviewer as white the next time dropped from 96 percent (random fluctuation, given no changes in his social position) to less than 85 percent. For positive experiences, the effects are in the opposite direction.

These changes line up in ways that reflect widespread racial stereotypes. Interviewers became likelier to see someone as black the more the respondents’ situations fit the stereotype of black people—and vice-versa for white people.

The studies we have conducted show that while race shapes our life experiences, our life experiences also shape our race. Race and perceptions of difference are not only a cause of inequality, they also result from inequality. Americans’ racial stereotypes have become self-fulfilling prophecies: the mental images Americans have of criminals and welfare queens, or college grads and suburbanites, can literally affect how we see each other.

Why Do We (Still) Care About Race & Ethnicity?

At this point you might be asking, why do we care about race? Aren’t we making racial divisions in society worse by talking about them? After all, didn’t we deal with these problems during the Civil Rights Movement? If races are socially constructed, can’t we just stop constructing them?

⁴ Saperstein, Aliya, “Can Losing Your Job Make You Black?” *The Boston Review*, 3 June 2013. <http://bostonreview.net/blog/can-losing-your-job-make-you-black>.

These are all legitimate and important questions because they help us understand that just as thinking about race only in terms of individual identity doesn't work, neither does thinking about racism only in terms of individual hatred or prejudice. Consider an example from Moya and Markus, in which a City Council proposes to build a chemical plant in a particular part of town that has a higher percentage of African American residents. If they were to justify their decisions, the City Council leaders would explain their choice of where to put the plant was based on land costs, distribution of jobs, and political pressure from particular constituencies. They would likely respond negatively to accusations of "racism," and defend themselves as not being racist, and not thinking about race at all in their decision. However, as Moya and Markus argue, racially disparate impacts do not require individuals to have thought about race consciously at all. Instead, we return to how race structures our society: to say that race is a social construction is not to say that it is not real. Indeed, we see its reality all around us in how it affects the life chances and opportunities of each of us.

Furthermore, there are concrete impacts of our nation's history of slavery and legal discrimination, of which Jim Crow is the most visible example. Until the mid 1960s, racial discrimination was the law of the land, and social programs, subsidies, and governmental actions were structured explicitly along racial lines. These structural impacts continue to reverberate in the distribution of wealth and opportunity in American society.

Now, you might ask, why do these inequalities still exist in society? What perpetuates them? After all, laws that included racially discriminatory language were banned by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, right? Yet, as researchers have demonstrated, members of different racial groups continue to experience American society in vastly different ways. This is true despite the fact that once-legal forms of discrimination are now illegal. Scholars in a range of disciplines have spent several decades attempting to figure out exactly why and how this occurs. (In fact, your research for the Informative Report will profit from this scholarship.) Indeed, what these researchers have found is that just because identity categories are socially constructed and not biological in basis does not mean that they don't affect each of us as individuals. Certainly, we need not be conscious of how we are doing race to continue to do it. This is what the Duke University sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva memorably called "racism without racists." What he means is that there is no need for someone to make explicit racial judgments for racial hierarchies to be reproduced.

Partially, this is the result of what psychologists call "implicit bias," which is the product of the various stereotypes, images, representations, and so on that are all around us and that alter how we think about people of different races (even if they are people of our own race). Recall Saperstein and Penner's research mentioned earlier in this chapter. In the cases of researchers relabeling individuals over the course of their lives, it is not that the skin color of any individual has changed, but rather the lens through which they are viewed that has changed. The fact that people's race can "change" over time helps us understand that race is a constructed category that shifts. This is true even if the researcher doing the marking is unaware of their shifting perceptions. "Implicit bias" occurs in ways of which the individual is not conscious. The actions

of the researchers in differently marking interviewees' racial identity following particular life events reflect broader societal stereotypes and biases, rather than individual dislike or hatred.

The effects of “implicit bias” can be found throughout everyday life and even in your college classrooms. In a well-known study, Donald Rubin’s “Nonlanguage Factors Affecting Undergraduates’ Judgments of Nonnative English-Speaking Teaching Assistants,” undergraduate students’ perceptions about their Graduate Teaching Assistants’ “foreignness” affected how they rated the GTAs’ understandability and communicative ability – even in situations in which the voice used in the lecture was that of a native English language speaker.



Invention Strategies: Getting Started & Choosing a Specific Issue

The theme of your informative report will be a problem or issue related to race and ethnicity in the United States. You have a wide variety of issues to explore, and you may want to consult local, regional, or national news stories and events; consider the ways in which race and ethnicity play out in your academic major or career interests; explore your own interests; or, investigate larger institutions that may play a role in social inequities in which race and ethnicity play an important factor; some of these institutions are insurance, medicine, education (standardized testing, etc.), justice, policing, banking, voting, governmental policies, and prison systems.

Here are five examples of topics that have important consequences for people and that will allow you to explore a range of causes.

- **Black Farmers.** The issue of Black Farmers is one that your readers may know very little about; in 1910, black farmers represented 14% of all farmers in the United States; currently, they represent only 1.4% of the total. Roxana Hegeman, in “‘We are Facing Extinction’: Black Farmers in Steep Decline,” investigates several of the systemic causes for this drop in the number of black farmers; for example, she describes the history of loans given by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which were biased in favor of white farmers.⁵ Given the history of black farming in Nicodemus, this issue may interest your readers who are looking for topics set in Kansas. Another related issue are problems

⁵ Hegeman, Roxana. [“‘We are Facing Extinction’: Black Farmers in Steep Decline.”](#) *AP News*, February 1, 2021.

that have been caused in attempting to provide funding to historically “socially disadvantaged farmers” to support farmers who are from ethnic minority groups; white, conservative farmers have claimed that these debt relief programs are giving these farmers an unfair advantage (Healy).⁶ The [Kansas Black Farmers Association website](#) may be another source to explore this issue, its challenges, and its causes.

- **Native American Students & College Education.** In an editorial by James Bryant, “Acknowledge—and Act,” he defines an important issue that links Native American students with universities and colleges. He reminds college administrators and educators about some of the statistics related to Native American students at the university level; for example, “just 19 percent of Native Americans aged 18 to 24 are enrolled in a college program, compared to 41 percent of the overall population.” Moreover, only 41% of Native American students do eventually graduate from their degree programs.⁷ Your readers will be interested in hearing about what are some of the immediate causes of these lower participation and graduation rates, which may include economic stability, cultural attitudes, and the effects of the coronavirus pandemic; additionally, readers will expect to hear about the historical, systemic challenges to Native American education, such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs schools that followed a policy of separating Native American children from their linguistic and cultural heritages.
- **African American Urban Neighborhoods & Higher Temperatures.** Research has been conducted on how the living environments of poor people as well as those of people of color are different from those of white, middle-class Americans. In a *New York Times* article about differences in temperatures between black and white neighborhoods, Brad Plumer and Nadja Popovich point to “redlining” government policies in the 1930s, which made it impossible for homeowners to receive loans in these areas; historically redlined neighborhoods, according to this research, have far fewer trees and more asphalt, with the consequences that these neighborhoods are five or more degrees hotter than those of more affluent neighborhoods.⁸
- **Race, Ethnicity, Poverty, and Housing Challenges.** Sophia Wedeen’s report, “Black and Hispanic Renters Face Greatest Threat of Eviction in Pandemic,” includes the following graphic that shows how apartment renters based upon their racial or ethnic identity face different levels of “cost burden rates”; either they are “severely burdened,”

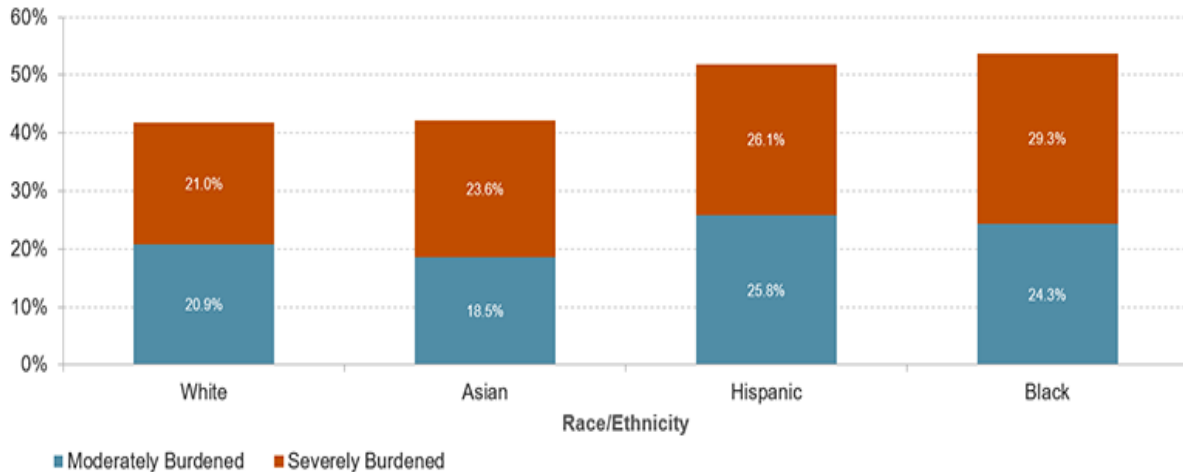
⁶ Healy, Jack. [“‘You Can Feel the Tension’: A Windfall for Minority Farmers Divides Rural America.”](#) The New York Times. May 22, 2021.

⁷ Bryant, Jr., James A. [“Acknowledge -- and Act.”](#) *Insider Higher Ed*, March 19, 2021.

⁸ Plumer, Brad and Nadja Popovich. [“How Decades of Racist Housing Policy Left Neighborhoods Sweltering.”](#) *The New York Times*, August 24, 2020.

meaning that 50% of their income goes to paying rent, or they are “moderately burdened,” in which 30% of their income goes to covering rent.

Share of Renter Households With Cost Burdens



The cost burden has increased and did so dramatically during the coronavirus pandemic, changes which Wedeen explains were caused by the fact that Latino and Black renters had jobs that were much more impacted by the pandemic-related economic downturn.⁹ Your readers would be interested in your investigation of the other causes for why over half of African American and Latino renters are moderately or severely burdened by their rent payments.

- Asian American Film Representation.** A blog by Nicole Park, “The Importance of Authentic Asian American Representation in Hollywood,” describes a problem: the lack of representation of Asian American characters in Hollywood films and, when there are actors of Asian ethnicity, the use of stereotypes, which can have negative consequences for young viewers.¹⁰ Although Park does not explore causes to this problem, your readers will be interested in how you could explore economic, cultural, or other causes to this problem.

Research Strategies: Narrowing the Scope of Your Issue

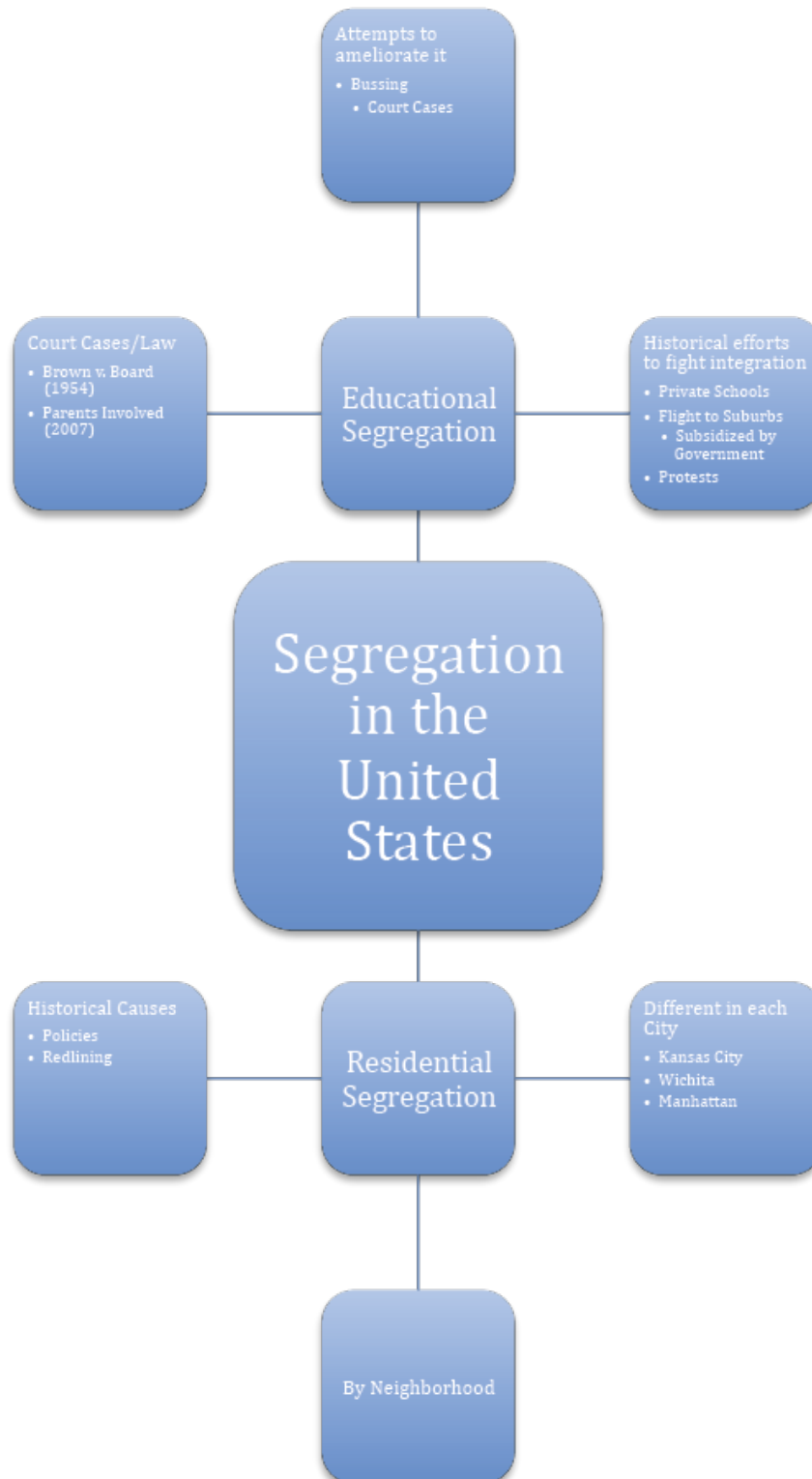
Before deciding how to narrow your topic, you should write down what you already know about the issue, helping you to begin to construct a general picture of the topic itself. You can then do some preliminary library or Internet research, especially if it is a topic that you don’t know much

⁹ Wedeen, Sophia. “[Black and Hispanic Renters Face Greatest Threat of Eviction in Pandemic](#).” Joint Center of Housing Studies for Harvard University. January 11, 2021.

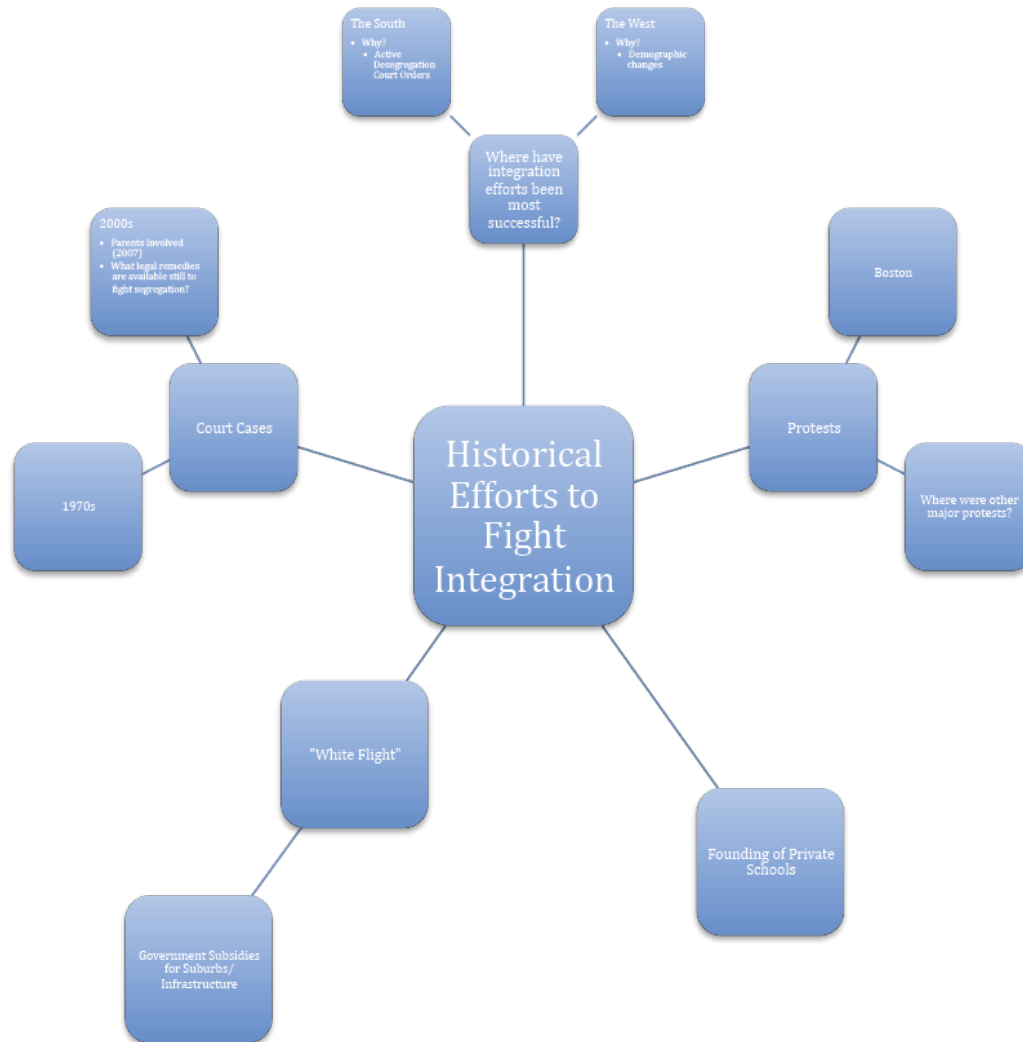
¹⁰ Park, Nicole. “[The Importance of Authentic Asian American Representation in Hollywood](#).” Center for Scholars & Storytellers.

about. This preliminary research itself can help you hone a more specific focus for your report and for the kinds of research you will continue to conduct.

Another way to help you focus your ideas is to use a cluster diagram, which can be particularly useful for students who benefit from more visual or graphic learning styles. Below is a very brief cluster diagram on the topic of “Segregation in the United States.” As with most topics, the cluster diagram starts with a broad issue (which you see in the largest box in the middle) and then explores related themes and topics in the branches that radiate out from the middle box. You’ll notice that each associated topic is connected to a larger node, creating a number of thematic clusters (hence the name “cluster diagram”). There is no right or wrong way to create a cluster diagram, but they are most useful when related topics are clumped together, allowing smaller, more specific questions or pieces of information to branch off into as many related nodes as possible. In doing so, a cluster diagram can help you find a new focus or narrow a broad topic into one that is more manageable for the scope of your Informative Report.



A cluster diagram like the one above on the topic of “Segregation in the United States” still leaves the researcher dealing with a too-broad topic. The next step is to pick a particular spoke of the cluster diagram and focus in on narrowing that topic. In this case, let’s choose to focus on “Historical Efforts to Fight Integration.”



Even after more fully developing this new cluster diagram, we find that, once again, the topic remains too broad. Often, it will take several steps of narrowing to reach a topic that is both narrow enough for 5–8 double-spaced page memo and which can be effectively researched. Let’s take another spoke and narrow the topic further around the question of “Where have integration efforts been the most successful?” Notice that as you narrow your topic, you also must begin to research around these more specific and answerable research questions. Each process of narrowing requires more research. In other words, to be successful in this report, you cannot simply find three outside sources and have that be the end of your research activity. Research is a cyclical process, one that leads to more questions, which leads to still more

research, which leads to still more questions, and so on. Ultimately, the sources you choose to cite in your final Informative Report should be only a part of the total research that you conducted and should clearly fit within the narrow topic you ultimately decide on.



Activity

With your classmates, look at these following three broad issues. Practice the clustering strategy to narrow down one of these issues so that is more manageable for you and more useful for interested readers.

- Immigration
- Poverty & Minority Ethnic Groups in the United States
- Social Inequality During the Coronavirus Pandemic



Research Strategies: Generating Research Questions

Drawing on the information you have gained from completing the clustering and group invention activities, you should be ready to formulate a primary research question. Research questions are important because they help you focus your research efforts. Instead of collecting every source you can find on the topic—or collecting only sources that support a pre-formed opinion—you will look for sources that help you answer specific questions, therefore helping you to focus your report as you write. Strong research questions are those that are interesting and significant to both you and your audience.

The difference between an issue and a research question is focus. Consider the difference between the issues and research questions below.

Issue: Housing Segregation in Kansas City

Research Question: What is the effect of housing segregation on access to K-12 education in Kansas City?

Issue: Wealth differences between African Americans and other minority groups

Research Question: Which social structures most influence wealth differences among groups?

Keep these templates in mind as you formulate your research question:

1. What is the role of race and ethnicity in X?

For example: What is the role of racial demographics in determining the composition of police departments?

2. What are the negative consequences of the issue or problem? In short, how does race and ethnicity affect X?

For example: What effects do racialized mascots have on Native Americans?

3. What are the major causes of this problem related to race and ethnicity?

For example: What are the historical, economic, and institutional reasons why Asian-American characters have been so underrepresented in Hollywood films?

4. Who is most affected by the issue or problem? How are these groups affected?

For example: Who is most affected by the large percentage of families in the United States who struggle to pay their rent?

5. What have been some attempts in the past to confront this issue? Why have these attempts failed?

For example: How has the U.S. government attempted to support black farmers in the past? How successful were these attempts? What were some roadblocks to these programs and policies?

Once you have formulated a list of potential research questions, answer the questions below to test their feasibility and choose the most productive focus for your informative memo.

1. Will your audience be interested in this question? Why?
2. Is the question significant for the audience? In what way(s)?
3. Is the question limited enough for a 5–8 page memo?
4. Is there a reasonable possibility of finding information about this topic in the time you have available? What might be some good sources of information to answer this question?

If you answered “no” to any of the above, you might need to find a new focus and a new primary research question.

Research Strategies: Considering Your Audience

Remember that, for this assignment, you are writing to a public official, rather than to your professor or your classmates. The research that you do will change based on your target audience, so it is important to narrow your topic and your research by figuring out who that audience is. To do this, think about the communities that you are a part of. As we have been discussing this semester, each of us is a part of many communities simultaneously. For example, you are a member of the Kansas State student body. If you reside on campus, you are not only a member of your campus community, but also a part of the city of Manhattan, Riley County, the 66th District of the Kansas State House of Representatives, and the 22nd District of the Kansas State Senate—and that just covers the state and local levels of government. Part of being an active citizen is participating in the political process on each of these different levels, and thus representatives of each of these communities (and more) are a potential audience.

One of the most important parts of writing to a specific audience is determining the needs of the audience before you plan what you will write. Knowing about your audience helps you understand what kind of information will be most valuable to them. Audience awareness also helps you to determine the tone and style of writing you will use. For this report, it may even be true that your audience knows something about your topic. However, the work of a public official covers many areas and they are very busy; often, it is only by being made more aware of information that they may act. Instead of thinking about the process of “informing” as just providing something new and surprising to an audience that knows little or nothing about your topic, think of yourself as someone who is doing the work of collecting the different information available about that topic and reporting back. For example, a Congressperson putting together a hearing on “Housing Segregation by Race” is likely aware that segregation is an issue today. However, they still will ask the Congressional Research Service to provide a report on the available research and up-to-date information on the topic prior to the hearing. Think of yourself as playing the role of a researcher in the CRS, providing as comprehensive a report as possible to a public official so that they have a synthesis of the information available to them.

Some students will find that they have a clear sense of what community they want to research—and therefore which target audience they will direct their research toward—before they have decided on a more specific or narrow topic. If you fall into this category, you might use the “thinking frames” activity below to help you find a clearer focus within the broad category of racial inequality within the U.S. Other students, however, might need to narrow their specific topic before determining the appropriate target audience. If that’s where you find yourself at this moment, you might want to skip ahead to the cluster diagrams below, returning to these thinking frames when you have a better sense of your intended audience.

These three following “thinking frames” can help you begin to think about how your topic is significant for your audience:

- My audience knows little about my topic, but it is important to them because...
- My audience has a misconception about my topic, but I can show them that...
- My audience does not see how my topic relates to them, but I can show them how it does...

Conducting Research and Finding Sources

Your instructor will give you information about how to find sources of information using Hale Library’s databases and catalog. Additionally, you will be asked to complete the online Library Assignment. You may also be required to complete some additional exercises on finding sources, like the activity later in this section. Once you have started your research, you will need to determine if the sources you find are credible and relevant. You should use the following guide to the “Big 5” criteria to evaluate your sources.

The “Big 5”: Evaluating Web and Print Sources for Research Potential

Nancy Trimm

What does it mean to evaluate sources for research potential?

Evaluating both print and web sources for research potential means you must hold those sources to the highest standards. To write a credible, thorough research paper of any kind, you must use only the most credible and relevant sources available. Determining the credibility of a source requires a bit of detective work. When you apply the “Big 5” criteria, you may uncover hidden motivations, new purposes for writing, unexpected authors or sponsors, and exciting research discoveries.

Why is it important to evaluate sources?

Using unreliable and discredited sources will weaken your writing and erode your credibility. To write with authority and credibility, you must demand the same from your sources.

What kinds of skills will I develop?

By successfully evaluating a source and determining whether or not it is credible or relevant to your research, you will be practicing critical thinking skills. Critical thinking skills are essential to your development as a writer and a thinker.

Where do I begin?

Before locating possible credible sources, you should ask a few questions.

Why am I writing?

To inform? To persuade? To explore an unfamiliar subject? To reflect on a personal experience? To entertain? To enlighten?

What sort of information am I looking for?

Facts and statistics? Historical perspectives? Opinions and editorials? News and information? Personal narratives? Scientific studies and research?

Where should I look?

Deciding what kinds of information you are looking for will help determine where to begin looking. Newspapers provide information on current events, whether local, national, or global. They also offer op-ed pieces designed to express a particular opinion or perspective. Academic journals offer critical analyses, reports, scholarly interpretations, and in-depth research on a variety of topics ranging from medicine to politics to psychology. The Internet can provide immediate access to a wide variety of links and a vast array of information. Government records detail census reports, legislation, and various other government policies and regulations.

The library is not only filled with journals, newspapers, books, dissertations, surveys, and reports, but also with knowledgeable, helpful people anxious to assist you with all of your research needs. Don't be intimidated! Ask for help!

What are the “Big 5” criteria for evaluating sources?*Authority*

Identify the author or Web page sponsor and publisher.

Does the sponsor and/or publisher identify his or her credentials? Does the author list his or her qualifications? Is the source an advocacy group? If so, what are they advocating? Is the source a commercial enterprise? If so, what are they selling? Is the source an educational institution? Is the source a local or state government? A national government?

Accuracy

Locate contact information for the author or webpage sponsor.

Locate the source of the article or site’s information. Is the information original or taken from someplace else? Can you verify this information?

Objectivity

Determine the author or website’s purpose.

Is the purpose to inform? To advertise? To persuade? To entertain? To explain? Knowing why a site or article was written is a crucial step in determining whether or not the information meets your research needs.

Coverage

Determine whether or not the article or site’s information is thorough and comprehensive.

Is the information you are seeking covered in enough depth to be useful? Is the topic of the article or site clearly presented? Are all claims supported by sufficient evidence and explanation? Do you expect more or different information given the title and opening remarks?

Currency

Identify the date the article or site was produced.

Is the information current enough for your purposes? If evaluating a webpage, when was the page last updated? Are the links current? Does the page contain many dead links?

What do I do once I determine whether or not a source fulfills the “Big 5” criteria?

If a source fulfills all “Big 5” criteria, you should feel confident in the credibility of that source. Use the source to provide context, explanation, evidence, and/or support for your essay’s

claims. Always avoid letting sources do all the speaking for you. Find your own writer's voice and speak with authority! The most important voice in your essay is your own!

Research Strategies: Note-Taking Review

Taking notes is an important, yet often overlooked, part of conducting research. By taking accurate and detailed notes, you will be able to present a cohesive report that will be useful to your reader. If you don't take notes, you may find yourself reading and rereading the same article several times as you look for a piece of information. You may also have problems with plagiarism if you don't carefully monitor what you have quoted or paraphrased from your sources.

The best method to use for taking notes is to read your sources rhetorically, meaning that you try to understand your sources' arguments while considering how you might use the sources when writing your paper. It's a good idea to use a journal to take notes as you read. You can keep a research journal in a notebook, on your computer or tablet, or even on your smartphone. Most research journals are divided into two columns. In one column you can make notes about the author's main ideas, unfamiliar words, and other important parts of the article. On the other side of the page, make notes about how you plan to use the source in your writing.

Another way to take effective notes is to annotate a source as you read it. Annotating a source means to write notes in the margins as you read, paying attention to questions you have, the author's main ideas, unfamiliar vocabulary words, and how the ideas in the article connect to one another. If the margins of the source are small or you need more room, you can use sticky notes to write on and attach them to the appropriate part of the article. Below is an example of possible annotations for the first three paragraphs of Aliya Saperstein's article, "Can Losing Your Job Make You Black?"

<p>Most Americans think a person's race is fairly obvious and unchanging; we know it the minute we meet him or her. Similarly, most academic research also treats race as fixed and foreordained. A person's race comes first and then his or her experiences, education, job, neighborhood, income, and wellbeing follow. My research with sociologist Andrew Penner on how survey respondents were classified by race over the course of their lives, calls into question this seemingly obvious "fact."</p> <p>The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth has been following a group of about 12,000</p>	<p><i>She immediately signals audience assumptions that she will refute through the article.</i></p> <p><i>This is the article's thesis, which states that the evidence collected by her and Penner refutes the idea that race doesn't change over one's lifetime.</i></p> <p><i>Where she got her evidence: A longitudinal study follows a group</i></p>
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<p>Americans since they were teenagers and young adults in 1979. From 1979 to 1998, the survey interviewers had to identify the race of the people they interviewed, even when those people had been repeatedly interviewed. At the end of each session, interviewers recorded whether they thought a respondent was “Black,” “White,” or “Other.” Here is the surprise: nearly 20 percent of respondents experienced at least one change in their recorded race over those 19 years.</p> <p>These changes were not random, as one might expect if the interviewers were just hurrying to finish up or if the data entry clerks were making mistakes. The racial classifications changed systematically, in response to what had happened to the respondent since the previous interview.</p>	<p><i>of people over the course of many years to study life changes.</i></p> <p><i>Their key finding: researchers marked some people’s race differently in the study for nearly 20% of those studied.</i></p> <p><i>Saperstein says that how researchers marked the race of research subjects was based on things that had happened in their lives not just skin color.</i></p>
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Activity

Talk It Out

Bring the research you’ve gathered, read, and annotated to class. Work with a partner and ask your partner the questions below. Make sure to listen carefully and to take notes on your partner’s responses. Play the role of a doubter, asking follow-up questions as needed, to help your partner develop his or her research.

1. Why do you think your audience will be interested in this topic?
2. What goal/purpose will be served by this report—for this particular audience?
3. What source seems most relevant to your purpose? Why?
4. What source seems least relevant to your purpose? Why?
5. What further research might be necessary to fulfill your report’s purpose?



Writing Strategies: Developing a Thesis

Remember that the purpose of your paper is to inform your audience about an issue they may have a misconception about or to broaden their perspective on a particular issue. To relate this purpose to your audience, you should carefully construct a thesis statement that communicates the topic of your paper and connects this topic to the audience's needs. While we often think of thesis statements as making an argument, they can, instead, provide a sense of the controlling idea of the text that is to follow, illustrate why the information is relevant to the reader, or make clearer the larger significance of the information. And while you might have learned that a thesis statement should be only one sentence, in fact, sometimes a thesis idea is expressed in more than one sentence. In this case, your thesis should answer the question: How does this issue relate to the interests of my audience?

You might also have learned that you should have a clear sense of your thesis statement before conducting research. However, this is rarely good advice. How are you supposed to know your findings before you do the research? That is why you find the information about constructing a thesis statement here, near the end of the chapter. Now that you have conducted some research and narrowed your topic, you can return to the ideas introduced earlier on how to relate your topic to your audience. This time you should have a clearer sense of the topic itself, the information you have found on that topic, and the specific audience to whom you are directing your report. These frames can now help you structure your thesis in relation to your audience:

- My audience knows a little about X, but I can help them learn more.

Example. The President of Kansas State is aware that there are different educational outcomes (such as graduation rates) for African American students and white students on the Kansas State campus. This memo will explain some of the causes of these disparate outcomes by examining the effects of educational segregation and disparate funding in Kansas at the K-12 level. Knowing about this information will allow the President of K-State to take it into account as they attempt to correct these different outcomes.

- My audience holds a misconception about X, but I can help to change their misconception.

Example. The President often gives speeches in which he tells members of the black community that young people have to take responsibility for their own success in life by going to school and working hard. However, my research shows that individual hard work is much less important than structural issues such as poverty, access to resources, and residential/educational segregation. Knowing this will allow the President to highlight policies addressing these structural issues rather than focusing on individual hard work.

- My audience doesn't see that X relates to them, but I can show how it does relate to their needs.

Example. Many Congresspeople don't see how race affects the proximity of so many communities of color to environmental pollutants in cities. My research shows that such communities of color are adversely impacted because of segregation and a perceived lack of political power despite decisions appearing to be made without mention of race.

Writing Strategies: Organizing Your Report

The organization of your report should make it easy to read and understand. In addition to following memo format, you should also consider the expectations that most audiences have for reading an informative report. These expectations include the following:

- *An introduction* that states your main purpose and thesis, explains how the issue is relevant to your audience, provides any necessary background information, and briefly previews the points to be discussed.
- *Body paragraphs* that include clear topic sentences, present examples from the source material, and include an explanation of how these examples relate to your main point and connect to your audience's needs.
- *A conclusion* that can either restate the main points of your report, pose new questions that the reader may pursue later, discuss the possible implications of your research, or present a call for action.

Writing Strategies: Forecasting Your Organization

In your introduction, you should forecast your organization to make your research report more readable for your audience. You can also give them cues about how the report should be read and how you will structure their reading experience. Think of these organizational cues as “traffic signs” or “road maps” to guide your readers.

Your thesis statement is one important organizational cue in which you explicitly tell your readers your overall point. You can also provide a purpose statement in which you give your readers the reason they are reading the report and list for them your overall goals. Additionally, you can provide a blueprint statement that directly tells readers about the structure of the report. The blueprint statement may act like a table of contents, telling readers what the major sections of your report will be.

Writing Strategies: Using Academic Language & Style to Talk about Race and Ethnicity

Each of us is always “doing race” at every moment, regardless of whether we are thinking about it or not. As writers, that means that your own work on this report is part of the same processes that we are studying and researching. As you write your informative report, you are also “doing race.” Consequently, the words you choose, the research you conduct, and the writing you perform are all part of that process of “doing race.” This is especially true of the racial terms you use to write about your topic. Earlier in the chapter, we looked at previous Census categories for race, such as “quadroon” and “octoroon” from the 1890 Census that no longer are meaningful. As the policies, structures, and cultures of society change, so does the terminology that we use to label racial groups. Often, this is the result of specific groups deciding what they would like to be called and which terms are offensive. Consequently, how we label members of groups is a matter of basic respect and formality. In the past, terms such as “Negro” or “colored” or “oriental” were considered acceptable. However, now they are considered insulting and denigrating. In your own writing, you should therefore always seek to be as respectful as possible, using the most appropriate terminology at the moment you are writing. Consequently, instead of the words mentioned in the previous sentences, you should use terms such as “African American,” “black,” “Asian-American,” or “Latina/o” as you draft and revise your informative report.

Writing Strategies: Writing Your Abstract

Your abstract provides a synopsis of your informative report; readers should be able to scan your abstract quickly to determine whether it will be useful for them. Your abstract should be approximately 100-200 words long, and it should focus on the important keywords that make up your report and that were used in your research process.

Your abstract should include a one-sentence summary of each of the sections of your report, including the following:

- Your overall issue, problem, or research question
- Your most important findings
- Your most important points of significance

Here is one example of an abstract, which is from Donald Rubin’s research study, “Nonlanguage Factors Affecting Undergraduates’ Judgments of Nonnative English-Speaking Teaching Assistants”:

Abstract

In response to dramatic changes in the demographics of graduate education, considerable effort is being devoted to training teaching assistants who are nonnative speakers of English (NNSTAs). Three studies extend earlier research that showed the potency of nonlanguage factors such as ethnicity in affecting undergraduates’ reactions to NNSTAs. Study 1 examined effects of instructor ethnicity, even when the instructor’s language was completely standard. Study 2 identified predictors of teacher ratings and listening comprehension from among several attitudinal and background variables. Study 3 was a pilot intervention effort in which undergraduates served as teaching coaches for NNSTAs. This intervention, however, exerted no detectable effect on undergraduates’ attitudes. Taken together, these findings warrant that intercultural sensitization for undergraduates must complement skills training for NNSTAs, but that this sensitization will not accrue from any superficial intervention program.

Evaluation Criteria

As you revise your informative report and share it with your classmates, consider the ways in which you have met the major expos criteria:

Purpose & Focus

A strong informative report focuses on an interesting and significant issue or problem related to race and ethnicity in the United States; you have chosen an issue that will be meaningful to a public audience and help their understanding about social problems that are structured by race and ethnicity. You provide a clear and engaging thesis statement to focus what you will be researching.

Development

You have satisfied your readers by using at least five secondary research sources to help them understand the social problem more; your research sources will be regarded as credible and

authoritative by your readers. Your audience will have a clear understanding about the structural and systemic causes and consequences of the problem.

Organization

You guide your readers skillfully through your informative report, and you signal your thesis clearly. You use different sections, headings, topic sentences, and transitional phrases to differentiate the different causes you are exploring. You effectively signal when you are contributing research from secondary sources as opposed to when you are adding additional explanation or background.

Tone & Style

You adopt a formal and academic tone, using MLA citation style or another citation system consistently. You show objectivity and treat your research issue and audience with respect. You use academic concepts and terminology, especially when you are talking about race and ethnicity.

Activity

Peer Review Workshop Activity

This workshop requires four partners to read your report and provide you with revision suggestions for different parts and criteria of this assignment.

Reader Role #1

Test the introduction. After reading the introduction, circle the writer's thesis statement. If you can't find the thesis, try to figure out what it will be and write it down in the margin. If the thesis does not seem to be relevant to an issue or problem related to race and ethnicity in the U.S., please note that down.

Based on the header and introduction, who is the intended audience? Why would they care about this specific topic? Note this information down. If you can't tell who the intended audience is or you may not feel that the audience is appropriate, suggest a few target audiences who might care about this information.

On a scale of 1–5, how well does the writer forecast what will happen in the body of the informative report?

What else can the writer do in the introduction to make it easier to read the report?

Reader Role #2

Test the first body paragraph. Skim the introduction to get the gist of the report, and then carefully read the first main body paragraph. Circle the main point or topic sentence. Put [brackets] around the examples the writer uses.

Does the writer explain *how* the examples are relevant for the intended audience? If not, note that for the writer in the margins of the report or in the space below. If you have time, you might provide some suggestions for how to better explain the relevance of the example(s).

Do all of the examples relate specifically and explicitly to the topic sentence of the paragraph? If not, list below the examples that don't belong in this specific paragraph. It's also possible that the examples seem to belong together, but the topic sentence needs to be revised to better reflect what the paragraph is actually doing or saying. If that's the case, note this problem in the space below.

What does the writer say about the relevance of the information to the intended audience? Does this seem convincing to you as a reader? Are there other reasons that the target audience might be interested in this information?

What is the strongest point or the most useful information in this paragraph? Why is it the strongest point?

What are two specific ways in which the writer could improve this paragraph?

Reader Role #3

Test the focus and organization. Read the circled topic sentence and then *quickly* read the remaining body paragraphs.

Within each paragraph, how well does the writer explain how the sources connect to the main point of the report? Note here any places where the connections need to be clearer, more explicit, or more developed.

Indicate in the report where you get lost or confused about what the writer is trying to say.

Note or highlight the transitional words that you find. What additional transitions are needed?

If the writer has included a forecasting statement in the introduction, does the organization of the report follow that roadmap? If not, note how it diverges in the space below.

Reader Role #4

Test the citation style and tone. Examine the body of the report solely for how the writer introduces facts and quotes, looking specifically for attributive tags. Remember that attributive tags are places where the writer introduces a source and might include the author's name and credentials, as well as the title of the article, book, or report.

Overall, how well does the writer introduce quotes or paraphrases? Rank the writer's integration of sources on a 1-5 scale. Remember that writers should avoid "dropped quotes" where there are no attributive tags. Make notes in the margins where more attributive tags are needed.

Write "citation?" in places where you think the writer needs to include parenthetical information about the source. Remember that any information that is not the writer's original work must be cited both within the report itself and on a works cited page. This is true whether it is directly quoted or paraphrased.

Write "tone?" in the places where you think the writer is no longer providing a balanced account of the issue, but instead is arguing for one side of the issue over another. If the writer is too informal or sounds combative or dismissive, you should also note the tone.

On a scale of 1–5, how appropriate is the writer's tone for a formal informative report?

Revising Your Report

First, read over your classmates' notes on your report and ask them for clarification, if necessary. These notes, of course, provide you with only a starting place for revising your report.

Remember that that you should think of revision not as simply changing a few words or moving a sentence or two, but often as rewriting full sections in order to clarify purpose, focus, and organization; conducting new research to more fully develop important points; reworking your tone and style in order to better match the audience and purpose; restructuring for clarity of organization; deleting sections that do not fit the overall purpose and focus; adding new sections that better develop your informative goals; etc. Given the goals of this assignment, you will want to pay particular attention to places where your classmates noted that they were confused or needed more information, as well as places where they marked "tone" in the margins but, again, these are only starting suggestions for larger revision.

Citing and Editing Your Report

Once you have fully revised your report, you can turn to the final editing process. Before you print out your report, check your Works Cited (or References) section to make sure it follows MLA or another citation style. Have you:

- Capitalized the titles of articles and books, and the names of websites?
- Italicized the titles of books and websites and put the titles of articles in quotation marks?
- Included parenthetical in-text citations for all information from every outside source, even if the information is paraphrased?
- Put all direct (word-for-word) quotes in quotation marks?
- Avoided referring to authors solely by their first names?
- Placed citations on the Works Cited in alphabetical order according to the first word in the citation (usually the author's last name)?
- Included your access dates for websites?
- Double-spaced your Works Cited and indented ½ inch after the first line of each entry? (i.e., used hanging indentation)
- Made sure that each parenthetical citation in your report also appears on the works cited page? Also make sure that everything that appears on the Works Cited is also listed in the report itself.

Finally, before you print out your report, make sure you read through it carefully for errors and typos.



Student Examples

Effects of Race on African American Male Student-Athletes in Division I NCAA Schools

Ashton O'Brien

Ashton O'Brien wrote this informative report in Kirsten Hermreck's Expos I class. It won first place in the 2017 Expository Writing Program Essay Award Competition.

To: Mark Emmert, NCAA President

From: Ashton O'Brien

Subject: Effects of Race on African American Male Student-Athletes in Division I NCAA Schools

Introduction

The United States has historically been a nation comprised of various ethnic groups, but early in the nation's history the white race established dominance over Africans through slavery. This racial hierarchy was the reason behind segregation of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and Predominately White Institutions (PWI). In 1954, this all reformed when Brown vs. Board of Education ruled racially segregated schools unconstitutional. Although PWIs were still reluctant to embrace African American students attending their institutions, they were exceedingly open to recruiting black athletes to improve their collegiate athletics (Curette 472). Many Americans are unaware of how race is still an issue in NCAA collegiate athletics. Understanding the connection between the racial demographics of Division I athletics within NCAA institutions and the African American racial stereotypes in collegiate athletics and its effect on the student-athletes is important for you as the NCAA President to be able to improve the inclusivity of your athletics program. In this brief report, I will share information regarding the racial demographics within the NCAA, African American stereotypes in athletics, and the resulting effects on student-athletes.

Racial Demographics

As the President, you already know that the NCAA has noticeably equalized its ratio of white to black male student-athletes in the last fifteen years. According to the NCAA database, the percentages of African American males increased in Division I basketball from 55 percent in 1999-2000 to 57.6 percent in 2015- 2016. A more significant increase was in NCAA Division 1 football with the percent of African American male athletes jumping from 39.5 percent in 1999-2000 to 47.4 percent in 2015- 2016. By comparing the past and present racial demographics, it is evident that your efforts as NCAA's President to ending segregation within Division I athletic

programs are effective, especially in narrowing the racial gap of Division I athletes. This information displays how in just fifteen years the ratio of black athletes has become equal or exceeded that of its white counterpart, but the administrative positions of the institutions that your association regulates do not expression this same pattern.

Although the NCAA has made great strides in creating a more inclusive environment for the athletes that participate in Division I football and basketball, the administrative positions of PWIs in the NCAA are greatly lagging behind. The scholarly journal, "Significance of Race in College Athletics," by Chase Smith demonstrates the significant difference of race by addressing the 2012 Racial and Gender Report Card within college sports reported by The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sports. This report displays the wide racial gap that is present in the administrative positions within PWIs. The majority of commissioners, presidents, athletic directors and head coaches of these institutions are white, while less than 15 percent of these positions are held by African Americans (Smith 398). These results shown in Smith's scholarly journal make it very evident that racial segregation and the hierarchy of white dominance over black are still present within the institutions your program regulates.

These unbalanced racial demographics at the administrative levels of these institutions' athletic programs could have possible implications on the inclusivity of NCAA programs. A possible implication could be a lack of executive African American leadership available to the black athletes in these institutions and might be an important aspect for you as the NCAA President to consider when addressing inclusivity at the administrative levels of these institutions.

As you are probably aware, PWIs in the NCAA have a relatively balanced ratio of white to black athletes and are disproportionate in the races that fill their administrative positions, yet the number of black athletes to attend these institutions is growing. According to "Significance of Race in College Athletics," "the interest of black athletes in football to attend a HBCU over a PVI has decreased over the last 40 years due to the amount of television exposure and state of the art facilities athletes receive at PWIs" (Smith 399). This information demonstrates how PWIs have been able to narrow the racial gap in their Division I athletes. However, this also demonstrates how race has implications on commercialism and attractiveness because Predominately White Institutions (PWI) receive better television exposure and facilities than Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) which places them at a disadvantage when recruiting athletes to come to their institution. Therefore, this information shows that race isn't just having implications on the segregation at the individual and administrative levels in NCAA athletic programs, but furthermore has implications on the commercialism and attractiveness of institutions within the NCAA.

Today the racial demographics of the Division I institutions in the NCAA show that although the percentage of African American athletes has steadily increased, there are still issues of racial segregation at the administrative level and implications of race at the institutional level. These issues are increasingly difficult to address when negative African American stereotypes still exist today. This information may be useful to you when considering the revision of policies

on who should be hired for administrative positions and on the advertisement of PWIs and HBCUs.

African American Stereotypes

Numerous stereotypes have been wrongfully representing African American males throughout U.S. history based strictly on the color of their skin, and today is no exception, even for Division I athletes. There are stigmas surrounding the physical attributes of the African American male athlete. In the book, “Black Sexual Politics,” Patricia Collins states, “the physical strength, aggressiveness, and sexuality thought to reside in Black men’s bodies generate admiration, whereas in others, these qualities garner fear” (153). This statement demonstrates how the same stereotype can be interpreted in both a positive and negative way. These qualities of strength and aggressiveness are what make them such great athletes and admired by many for their achievements in collegiate athletics. However, these same characteristics are the reason why some people see them as “dangerous” because they are allegedly associated with deviant behaviors of violence. The deceptive physical stereotypes that surround black male athletes could possibly portray the NCAA in a negative light because the athletes competing in their program are seen as “dangerous” and “deviant.” This might be important for you to consider as the NCAA president because you want your athletic programs to be portrayed in the most accurate and positive ways possible.

The misconceptions associated with the physical attributes of African American male athletes are historically linked to their intellectual abilities, subsequently leading to further stereotypes. Billy Hawkins describes the historical use of scientific racism, that labels black male athletes as “physically superior” and “intellectually inferior,” in his book “The New Plantation” (473). Some educational institutions perpetrate this stereotype of black males’ inability to learn by giving their black athletes passing grades even when undeserved (Hawkins 473). This stereotype could possibly lead the athletic departments of institutions in the NCAA to assume that their African American athletes are just “dumb jocks” and place them into non-rigorous majors, just to ensure their athletic eligibility. Black athletes in the NCAA could be at a disadvantage to their white teammates because of this lack of attention to their education and might hinder their career opportunities in the future.

Stereotypes about African American males’ physicality and intellect have been around for many years and is affecting even the most elite athletes in the NCAA today. As the President of the NCAA, you understand the importance of the education that the athletes within your association receive and the inclusivity of your programs. The issues of racial demographics and the stereotyping leave lasting effects on the NCAA Division 1 athletes and acknowledging these effects might be useful in improving the inclusivity of your programs.

Effects on Student-Athletes

The racial demographics of the student-athletes and administrative positions present in PWI’s athletic programs within the NCAA affect the relationship between black and white teammates and causes a shortage of role models for their black athletes. According to the study of African American male students-athletes on PWI college campuses in the journal, “Racism and

Stereotyping on Campus” revealed that the majority of athlete responses did not agree that sports bring racial groups together, and that black athletes often felt isolated outside of required team activities (Beamon 129). Krystal Beamon also addressed the fact that only a small percentage of athletic administrative positions are held by African Americans and explains how this leaves very few role models for black student athletes on campus (124). This information demonstrates how the racial demographics can possibly have negative effects on the African American athletes in the NCAA. As the NCAA President, I know you are concerned with the feelings of isolation and absence of role models for the athletes within your association and how this can affect their college experience and long-term life after collegiate athletics.

The absence of role models due to racial demographics and the intellectually inferior stereotypes of African American male athletes might possibly have effects on their education and graduation rates. Out of the seventy-six major Division I athletic conferences, only 50.2 percent of the African American male student athletes graduated (Beamon 121). These poor graduation rates could possibly reflect on the lack of attention given to educating African American athletes due to their alleged “intellectual inferiority.” Because half of African American male athletes don’t graduate, they return to their communities without degrees and leave them with less employable opportunities. As the President of the NCAA, this information regarding the effects that racial demographics and stereotypes has on the campus experience, education, and graduation rates of the African American male student athletes could be helpful in improving the educational standards and inclusivity of your athletic programs.

Conclusion

Many Americans are unaware of the how race is still an issue in NCAA collegiate athletics. This increases the importance of understanding the connection between the racial demographics of Division I institutions and the African American stereotypes and their effects on African American male student athletes in collegiate athletics. In your position of NCAA President, you have the opportunity to take this information and be able to improve the inclusivity of your athletics program.

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Racial Segregation in Today's Schools and its Effect on Academic Achievement and the Perpetuation of Racial Inequality

Elaine LaRoche

Elaine LaRoche wrote this informative report in Zian Butler's Expos I class. It won second place in the 2018 Expository Writing Program Essay Award Competition. LaRoche wrote this report for Betsy DeVos, who was the Secretary of Education under the Trump administration.

To: Secretary of Education

From: Elaine LaRoche

Subject: Racial Segregation in Today's Schools and its Effect on Academic Achievement and the Perpetuation of Racial Inequality

Introduction

Separate but equal has long been proven by law to be ineffective; however, scholars would agree there are still signs of segregation in our schools. Not only does segregation in schools still exist but it is affecting academic achievement of black students adversely according to research. As Secretary of Education, students' success should be one of your main priorities and for that an excellent environment must be created in all schools. If higher quality education is not provided to minority schools, the inequalities between races will only continue in this country. As mentioned in this report, systematic racial segregation is still at large within schools in the United States leading to lower funding of minority schools which therefore results in lower academic success of blacks maintaining the racial gap between them and whites.

Segregation Within Schools

The segregation of minorities and whites still exists in the United States' schools. On May 17, 1954 it was decided by the Supreme Court that racial segregation within schools violated the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution (*Brown v Board*). However, despite this ruling when I walked into my own high school a year ago, many of the students I saw were white. But, if I were to go to the other side of town and go into that school, most of what I would see would be black students. Segregation in schools is gone by law but still very much apparent in our country. The National Center for Education Statistics provides this data: 52% of whites are likely to go to a school with less than 25% minority enrollment while only 6% of blacks will go to that

school (Racial/Ethnic Enrollment in Public Schools). The statistics are switched at a school above 75% minority enrollment: 5% of whites would go to a school like this while 57% of blacks will attend a school akin to this (Racial/Ethnic Enrollment in Public Schools). This research only goes to show that segregation still exists in some sense throughout the United States: a white student is more likely to attend a school with majority white students while a black student will be more likely to attend a school with majority-minority enrollment. This points to something wrong within our schools; in an equal world the proportion of students by race should be equal to the proportions in the overall population. *Brown v Board* declared that separate facilities for different races were inherently unequal (*Brown v Board*); however, as it stands, Madame Secretary, racial segregation still exists in our schools.

De facto segregation is segregation that happens by fact although not required by law. In Steven Rivkin's article, "Desegregation Since the Coleman Report," he discusses how white flight and de facto segregation has affected segregation in school districts. De facto segregation results from "the private choice of individuals to live in one part of a metropolitan area rather than another" (Rivkin). White flight (whites moving away from black populations) has only intensified the segregation between districts resulting in de facto segregation (Rivkin). Eleanor Barkhorn mentions in her article, "Why are American Schools Still Segregated?" that the "racial imbalance tends to exist between school districts, rather than within them" (Barkhorn). There is no segregation within a district but the school district itself is a line separating minority populations from white ones. This creates the racial isolation we see in schools. There is no easy solution for this: creating an integrated school would require students to travel across district lines, an idea that has already been struck down by the Supreme Court (Barkhorn). For now, Madam Secretary, segregation still exists through what we call de facto segregation.

Lower Funding to Minority Schools

Minority schools tend to come from areas of lower income creating less resourceful schools. As you know, schools are funded through various sources: Federal, State, and Local funding. Local funding is almost entirely property taxes from residential and commercial properties as direct revenue sources for the local school district (McCann). This can create a large gap in funding between school districts based on the wealth of the population: "wealthier, property-rich localities have the ability to collect more in property taxes... poorer communities with less of a property tax base may have higher tax rates, but still raise less funding to support the local school district" (McCann). This lower funding leaves students with the "least resources, the least qualified teachers, and substandard school facilities" (McCann). Barkhorn confirms this statement by saying that areas of concentrated poverty and segregated minority schools have "less experienced and less qualified teachers, high levels of teacher turnover, less successful peer groups and inadequate facilities and learning materials." These types of inequalities create a huge gap in the education that whites versus minorities receive. Despite efforts to equalize education for all races, there is still a racial divide between the quality of school a white student may go to versus the one a black student would go to. In no way do I want to lower the standards of schools in the wealthier areas, but we cannot forget about the poorer, minority districts. Providing an exceptional education quality to all students should be one of your goals,

Madame Secretary, raising the quality of schools in minority districts will benefit the United States by providing a better educated populace.

White flight from neighborhoods as blacks move in lowers the value of the property causing low-income minority districts. The white flight that caused residential segregation also causes a discrepancy in the equity value of homes. In “The Origins of Durable Racial Inequality,” white flight is caused by a fear that as blacks move into a neighborhood the property values may decrease; as the whites move out, they cause the very thing they were fearing would happen (Brown et al.). The “refusal of white Americans to live in neighborhoods with more than 20 percent blacks means that white-owned housing is implicitly more highly valued than black-owned housing” (Brown et al.). This creates a difference in the net worth of whites versus blacks because blacks will typically have homes worth less in equity. The consequence of this, Madame Secretary, is a lower property tax base which directly leads to the lower funding of schools as discussed above.

Lower Academic Success of Black Students

Academic success is a huge factor in future life careers. When minority districts are receiving lower funding and low-quality education as discussed above, it is not surprising that there is an academic achievement gap between the races. The SAT is a generalized test that is used as an entrance exam for many universities. Being a generalized test, it should be able to show results without racial gaps in scores. However, despite attempts to equalize academic achievement, racial gaps persist in SAT scores (Reeves and Halikias). In Richard Reeves and Dimitrios Halikias’s study, they analyzed the math scores in the SAT; they used publicly available College Board population data for all the students that took the test in 2015. If there were no racial gaps in the data, “the racial breakdown of scores at any point in the distribution would mirror the composition of test takers as a whole; 51% white, 21% Latino, 14% black, and 14% Asian” (Reeves and Halikias). However, that is not seen but rather the top scores from 750-800 range is 60% Asian and 33% white and only 5% Latino and 2% black. The lowest scores between 300 and 350 go as follows: 37% Latino, 35% Black, 21% White, and 6% Asian (Reeves and Halikias). The low-funded school districts are made up of a minority population of mostly Latinos and blacks; this fact explains why Latino and black scores are so much lower than whites. They do not have access to equal opportunity education because of the lack of funding in their districts, leading, therefore, to lower test scores that effects the entirety of their future. As Richard Reeves states, “These gaps [between white and black test scores] has significant impact on life chance, and therefore on the transmission of inequality across generations” (Reeves and Halikias). Without the same “life chance” whites have, blacks are left to continue in their parents’ footsteps with a low paying job and low-income housing due to the low scores they received. Madame Secretary, closing the gaps in scores with more high achieving minorities will create a more equal society with better futures for the minority population.

Maintaining Racial Inequalities

As the education system stands now Madame Secretary, it only serves to continue racial inequalities. Despite being in what Fredrick Harris and Robert Lieberman call a “postracial” society in their article, “Racial Inequality After Racism,” we still experience racial discrimination

(Harris and Lieberman). They mean by this that as a society we have moved on from thinking that people of color are lesser than whites. This realization is important when trying to discern why racial segregation still exists. While the discrimination is “more subtle and hidden from view than before, [it is] no less potent” (Harris and Lieberman). De facto segregation is an example of this subtle discrimination causing the discrepancies in our educational system. There is no law that directly segregates minorities and whites, yet it still exists. Madame Secretary, beyond education these disparities exist “across a wide range of measures—including income, employment, education, health, housing, and criminal justice—African Americans and other minorities of color have continued to lag behind whites” (Harris and Lieberman). My sources would agree that this racial inequality is preserved by the lower quality education in areas of lower income which is made mostly of minorities. Without the college preparedness that whites have blacks have a decreased chance of college graduation, only half has likely to graduate as whites, and therefore less opportunity to get employed in a job with a higher income (Harris and Lieberman). Without a well-paying job, the student when they become an adult will be stuck living in another low-income district where they will raise their kids to share the same fate.

Conclusion

Madame Secretary, the segregation that appears in our schools happens by fact, not law; however, it is still separate, and separate but equal has never been true. In my research, I have found that the facilities that are in minority populations are unequal to the higher funded schools in white districts. These differences cause a gap in the education of whites versus minorities. In some sense, whites have a leg up on the competition, leaving minorities to struggle with their less adequate educational systems. Minorities would then have the lower paying jobs in the lower income school districts, perpetuating the racial inequality in our country.

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Chapter 6

Autoethnography



Autoethnography Assignment Description

This unit offers an exciting opportunity to focus on connecting the personal to the cultural. This simply means that we will be exploring the ways in which our individual identities are necessarily tied to the culture(s) in which we were raised and in which we are currently living and articulating what that means to us as members of a larger society. For, although many of us prefer to think of ourselves as unique, much of our behaviors and thoughts are intrinsically tied to the people and ideas that surround us. Indeed, a common definition for culture is the learned behaviors, values, and beliefs that are shared and practiced by a group of people. Our larger society is composed, then, of these “groups of people,” and we form expectations and rules based on our recognition of them. For example, have you ever noticed how your behavior changes, however slightly, throughout a typical day of encounters on campus: with friends, roommates, acquaintances/classmates, professors and instructors, the person who sells your morning coffee? Or, how you use different language to speak with your parents as opposed to your romantic partner? Your roommates and your bosses? These (often) seamless decisions you make actually play into a complex and dynamic social system that both acknowledges your role in the situation and evaluates your contribution to maintaining the social order. What does it mean to be a woman, we might observe, or to be a member of a particular racial or ethnic group, and what happens if we challenge conventional expectations?

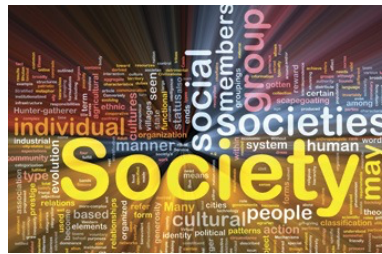
What's your story?



This approach to theorizing the self is a new answer to an old question: Who am I? Contemporary philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah further describes the socially constructed nature of identity, noting “Our families and schools, our churches and temples, our professional associations and clubs, provide two essential elements in the tool kit of self-creation: first, they provide ready-made identities—son, lover, husband, doctor, teacher, Methodist...—whose shapes are constituted by norms and expectations, stereotypes and demands, rights and obligations; second, they give us a language in which to think about these identities and with which we may shape new ones.”¹ The language that we use to explore identities in our society often primarily focuses on how we conceive of gender, socioeconomic status (class), and race, and how we allocate power accordingly. For example, as we’ll discuss in the next chapter, ideas of what it means to be a man or woman are culturally negotiated, meaning that while there are

¹ Appiah, Kwame Anthony. “Cosmopolitan Patriots.” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 23, 2011, p. 625.

biological sex differences, gender differences enjoy a varied spectrum that in itself contains expectations of behaviors. And, when thinking about the social construction of class in the United States (a topic we'll explore in Unit 3), you might be familiar with the notion of the "American dream," where hard work and perseverance are rewarded with social power in the form of status and higher income. Such line of thought goes something like this: if you work hard, you will be able to succeed, no matter the conditions of your birth. This theory of social mobility has deep roots in the United States and yet is challenged by increasing gaps in wealth and access to education. How our society grapples with that increased stratification supports Appiah's assertion that language can help us shape new identities, for, what would we call the "American dream" today? Further, what do you think about the revelation that race is a social invention based *not* on biological distinctions but rather on shifting political and demographic landscapes? Social psychologist Marilyn Brewer explains that such social identities as gender, class, and race, "are based on collective beliefs about shared attributes, values, and experiences that constitute the content of specific social identities."² In other words, writers like Appiah and Brewer want us to know that in order to really understand ourselves as individuals, we need to do at least two things: reflect on personal experience and analyze how those personal experiences reflect and contribute to larger social structures, and/or challenge those social expectations.



We will continue to explore these concepts throughout the semester, but how you see yourself as an individual is likely to be connected to at least one of these key identifying factors. Your ability to describe and reflect upon that sense of self is what we will be exploring in the first essay, the Autoethnography.

What Is The Autoethnography And Who Will Read It?

While there will be many occasions during this course to conduct outside research, the autoethnography asks you to focus instead on the personal, subjective experience of your own life, and to explore the ways in which an individual experience acts in dialogue with the larger structures of society. Your essay will concentrate on one "snapshot" moment of your life in which you learned something about how others see you as part of our larger society. Perhaps you have a vivid memory of realizing yourself as middle-class, for example, or of the first time in which you saw yourself as a man. Such moments of self-awareness require quite a bit of reflective thinking as you search your past for examples and then analyze what they mean in

² Brewer, Marilyn B. "Optimal Distinctiveness, Social Identity, and the Self." *Handbook of Self and Identity*, 2nd ed, edited by Mark R. Leary and June Price Tangney, Guilford Press, 2003, p. 480.

connection to your socially constructed identity. The heart of your essay will be the analysis, those connections you make between your own sense-of-self and the broader social meaning: what does it mean to be middle-class in our society today? What does it mean to be a man or woman? What does it mean to be a member of a particular ethnic group? How do we describe and define those terms, and what meaning do they hold for us and for those around us?

Your writing will include narrative techniques and well-developed analysis that makes connections between your personal experience and the larger social structure for a general, interested academic community of readers that includes your classmates and instructor.

What Will Your Autoethnography Look Like?

Your autoethnography will have two parts: a narrative that illustrates a single moment connected to a part of your cultural identity, and an analysis that explains *how* the narrative reveals something significant about that cultural identity and *what* you think it reveals about your place in society. This assignment should be a total of 4–5 typed, double-spaced pages. The narrative will provide the sensory focus of the essay—the who, what, when, and where part—and should be contained to 1–1.5 pages. It follows, then, that the analysis—the why and “what does it all mean” part—will be 3–4 pages. While this is meant to read as a single essay, breaking it into two sections helps you as the writer in two important ways. First, offering your narrative as a snapshot moment allows you the space to really invite the readers into your experience. They want to understand you better and stories are a powerful way of letting them do that. Second, analyzing how the narrated moment relates to your own sense of identity further shapes the readers’ understanding of who you are, which is an important part of being in a community. Most importantly, that explanation will lead you to more deeply explore the meaning of your social identity. To fully understand that broader meaning, you will have to ask questions of your narrative, the types of which are provided as examples here: What are the terms and implications of being a member of the middle-class in our society? How do we understand the values and significance of gender roles as they relate to our own lives? What does it mean to be a young African American adult in today’s culture? This analysis will provide critical insight into your “place” in society and will deepen your understanding of how that society functions.

What Are The Objectives?

By the end of this assignment, you should be able to do the following:

- Demonstrate awareness of how you are positioned as a member of a particular cultural group.
- Narrate a specific experience that is relevant in illustrating cultural identity.
- Use descriptive strategies to vividly create impressions for the reader.
- Identify how identity is influenced by the structures of gender, class, and/or race.

- Analyze implications of social systems in your life, particularly as revealed in your experience.

Rationale

This assignment gives you the opportunity to focus on diversity and to connect analysis—the type of writing that we normally expect to see at the college level—with creative nonfiction and storytelling strategies. The type of flexibility that is required to connect these two different purposes of writing is important to your development as an academic writer; it also helps to meet both the critical thinking and communication Student Learning Outcomes for K-State.

How Should I Think About Analysis?

As human beings, we are often content to stay within our comfort zones, believing in the truth of our experiences and the value of our traditions. This essay, and this class in general, challenges you to go beyond the surface of your experiences and consider the reasons *why* and *how* those truths, and/or traditions, came to be. Challenging commonly held beliefs does not mean that they are wrong or inaccurate (although some may be), but the act of reconsidering itself helps to deepen your understanding of the world and to strengthen your critical thinking skills. Such goals are fundamental to a college education.

To help you develop strong critical thinking skills, we'll be asking you questions that will vary for each assignment but that build upon the following foundations of analytic thinking:³

- Purpose—What is the objective or goal of this text? Of this activity?
- Information—What examples are provided to support the purpose? What types of examples are they?
- Conclusions—How do I interpret the information provided? Are my conclusions different from the writer's?
- Concepts—What are the underlying theories, principles, or definitions that I must know in order to understand the text?
- Point of View—What are the assumptions the writer makes about the topic? How does that perspective reveal his or her worldview? Am I as the reader applying my own presuppositions? What clarifying questions would I like to ask the writer?

³ Elder, Linda and Richard Paul. *The Thinker's Guide to Analytic Thinking: How to Take Thinking Apart and What to Look for When You Do*. 2nd ed., Foundation for Critical Thinking Press, 2007.

- Implications/Consequences—What is the significance of this topic or idea? Why and how does it matter to the world beyond the writer? This is the “so what” question.

Developing critical thinking skills requires a type of intellectual courage; you must be exposed to different perspectives and engage with them in order to better understand yourself and, thus, better understand how you operate in the world.

Activity

Getting to Know Yourself

Many social psychologists and sociologists argue that “the groups we belong to profoundly influence how others know us—they are the lens through which people view us.”⁴ Reflecting on how others know us and how we know ourselves is the first step in both thinking critically about your identity and drafting your Autoethnography. Below is a series of prompts that will help you begin.

- What are some of your “ready-made” identities as characterized in the introductory paragraphs of this chapter? Are you someone’s son or daughter, for example, and/or were you raised in a particular religious tradition? These are types of identity categories to which you belong purely by chance/birth. List as many of these “ready-made” identities that you can think of.
- What are some groups of which you are a part voluntarily, your “self-created” identities? You might think here about political affiliations and occupational interests. Again, list as many as you can think of.
- Now, think about how others might view the same groups, for, as social psychologists would continue, “Although some of our self-views are gained by direct experience with our environment, most of what we know about ourselves is

⁴ Hogg, Michael A. “Social Identity.” *Handbook of Self and Identity*, 2nd ed, edited by Mark R. Leary and June Price Tangney, Guilford Press, 2003, p. 462.

derived from others.”⁵ Looking at the list you just created to describe aspects of your own identity, respond to the following prompts.

- How have you heard other people who share in your “ready-made” and “self-created” identities describe or characterize themselves?
- How have you heard others who do not share in those identities characterize those identities? For example, if you identify as a member of a particular political party, how have you heard others of opposing or alternative parties describe yours? How do such characterizations make you feel?

Activity

Getting To Know Each Other

Before we go further in drafting the Autoethnography, it is important to get to know a part of the audience to which you will be writing: your classmates. Indeed, your classmates will be your writing community for an entire semester, serving as readers of your work at all stages of the writing process. And, as the main theme of this course is the relationship between communities and identities, we think it’s good to begin that conversation about how our identities intersect with or differ from others in our community by officially introducing ourselves in a brief essay.

This first writing activity provides a chance to continue flexing your self-reflective muscles and will help you get to know the other members of your writing community. You will share it with your classmates and turn it in to your instructor for informal evaluation as a kind of “diagnostic” moment. This means that while the activity will not be formally graded, it will serve to introduce you as a writer to your instructor who will be looking for signs of writing strengths and weaknesses.

To complete this introduction, you should respond to this question: What do others need to know in order to understand what it’s like to be me? In addition to the responses from the previous writing activity, you might also find it useful to think about the following social demographic categories:

⁵ Burke, Peter J. and Jan E. Stats. “A Sociological Approach to Self and Identity.” *Handbook of Self and Identity*, 2nd ed., edited by Mark R. Leary and June Price Tangney, Guilford Press, 2003, p. 131.

Age	Gender	Race	Marital status
Ethnic heritage	Region	Class	Able-bodiedness

As you draft this introduction be sure to be explicit about what has influenced you and how it has influenced you. You might also consider writing about the relationship between more than one factor, e.g. divorced woman or young Latino. Offer your readers specific details and examples to explain your points, and be sure to provide enough of that explanation to help them understand where you're coming from.

Your instructor might have you complete the writing task in-class, or may assign it as homework. When you have finished the activity, you will join your classmates in a circle and do a round-robin reading of the introductions. As you read your classmates' work, look for both shared experiences (common ground) as well differing perspectives, not to judge or critique them, but to better understand where each of your classmates is coming from. You should also keep some notes of your own to help you remember names. This is a dynamic way to engage with your peers immediately, and to build a strong foundation from which you'll work together throughout the semester.

Activity

Choosing a Topic for the Autoethnography

Beginning an essay can be challenging, especially if we sit down to write thinking that we have to find the "best" idea or the most "correct" answer right away. And, as your previous reflective work on pages 35–37, the introductory essay, and the discussion of Reyes' essay likely demonstrate, there are many ways in which our self-perceptions are both shaped and reflected—and sometimes challenged—by the way society sees us.



Beyond the reflective work you've already completed, then, a helpful strategy at this stage of the essay is to explore your history, looking for events and situations that hold some meaning for you and reflect the ways in which your identity is influenced by social expectations. Perhaps you vividly remember conversations in the kitchen with your mom, discussing your emerging political views; or maybe you recall a holiday during which your brother received very different toys than you did. Writing a list—without stopping for details just yet—can help you get some ideas on the page.

How Matt Discovered His Story

When Matt first started to think about his Autoethnography topic, he thought he would never find an idea. "I don't have a cultural identity," he told his instructor. "I'm just a regular white guy from Salina."

Matt's instructor suggested that he generate a list of meaningful events in his life. She told him not to worry about the cultural identity part of the assignment as he made his lists. Matt followed his instructor's advice, and his list is reproduced below.

Events

Teaching guitar lessons	Learning to ride a horse
Graduation trip	Learning to drive the tractor
Graduation ceremony	Getting grandpa's watch from dad
Leaving my best guitar at home	Jenna's accident

After creating his list of meaningful events, Matt chose two of the ideas on which to freewrite: getting his grandpa's watch and leaving his guitar at home. You can read those freewrites below. [A note here on freewriting: Your goal in this stage of the writing process is to get down on paper any and all ideas that come to mind when you think about the prompt. Aim to write without stopping for at least several minutes, or as directed by your instructor, and do not stop to edit or censor your words and ideas. This strategy helps you access your thoughts without restraint.]

Grandpa's Watch

My dad gave me his father's watch when I was 18. His father had given it to him, too. It's an old pocket watch and it doesn't work anymore, but it was important to my dad so it's important to me, especially since my grandpa died from stomach cancer two years ago. When he gave it to me, my dad told me that I should hang onto it and give it to my son someday, so that's what I'm going to do.

My Guitars

I have six guitars. Three of them are acoustic and three are electric. Guitar playing has always been a hobby of mine, and my mom plays guitar too. I brought two of my guitars with me to

school. The best guitar I have is an acoustic made of Brazilian Rosewood. It makes other guitars sound like crap. I left it at home though when I came to K-State because my mom was afraid someone might try to rip it off. It cost almost \$3000.

Now that Matt has two paragraphs written, one for each idea, he must choose which topic seems best suited to the objectives of the Autoethnography. Play the role of Matt's classmate by helping him test his topic ideas through this talk-it-out activity.

1. Can you see a way that his grandpa's watch or his guitars could relate to his gender, class, or race? What kind of story might he think about telling?
2. Look back at his original list. Do any of the other possible topics relate to gender, class, or race? In what ways?
3. As a reader, what do you think Matt's best potential topic is and why do you think so?

Now it's time to choose YOUR topic. Using the work you have already completed as a starting point, create your own quick list of important events. Then, choose two or three topics over which to freewrite.

Once you have written those paragraphs, get into small groups with your classmates and talk-it-through.

1. Share your freewrite paragraphs with your peers. For each classmate, identify the connection between the topic and the writer's cultural identity (gender, class, race, etc.). What is that connection?
2. Look back to each group member's original list. For each of the other topics, can you see a possible connection to an aspect of the writer's cultural identity—race, class, gender? What are those connections? [Note: asking the writers questions here is as useful as telling them what you see.]
3. As a reader, what do you think is each writer's best potential topic and why do you think so? It would be useful to review the assignment guidelines first.

After you have written your responses to these prompts for each of your group members, discuss your findings with each other, ask clarifying questions, and offer further feedback. Such talking-it-through moments support the writing process by letting you informally test ideas before committing to just one on paper.

Another Approach

If you're still struggling to find a topic for the narrative portion of your Autoethnography, try starting with social identity lenses instead. Do you remember a moment in which you were made aware of your gender? For example, was there a holiday in which your sister received more stereotypically feminine toys (dolls and doll houses, for example) and you were given more stereotypically masculine toys (a football or baseball, cars, or building blocks)? Do you remember a moment in which you were made aware of your racial identity? Or a moment in which you were made aware of your (or your family's) socioeconomic class?

Student Examples

Moving Into My Gender Identity

Katie Brophy

We have reached a point in the writing process where looking at examples of the assignment may prove useful. As you read the following essays, pay close attention to the moment the writers chose to narrate and consider how your potential topic relates.

Katie Brophy wrote this autoethnography in Emi Griess's Expos I class when it was a slightly different assignment. Your autoethnography does not require outside research.

Moving Into My Gender Identity

I remember the day very clearly. It was a sunny spring day, with the faint aroma of flowers beginning to blossom. I had just gotten home from school, where I was in the third grade. My mom had picked up my brother, sister, and me from school that day, and we were all just talking about how our days had been. It was really nothing out of the norm. That was until she told us the news. My Uncle Tim was moving back to Kansas City. After all these years of just seeing him on holidays, I was finally going to be able to see him more. I couldn't believe it. Uncle Tim was my favorite uncle. I was looking forward to showing him the strong independent young lady I was becoming, and he would see the difference. As the days passed, I began to get antsy. I began to periodically check the clock, as if I were waiting for it to miraculously skip forward to the time when I would be leaving to go to my Uncle Tim's new place. I was ready to do everything in my power to ensure that my Uncle Tim would stay here in Kansas City permanently. After what seemed like forever, the day finally came. It was move in day. Not only was he coming back, but I would get to help him move into his new house.

I remember the sense of excitement I felt when I saw that big, white truck with an orange stripe and the writing “U-Haul” on its side. And there beside it stood my Uncle Tim. He had not changed one bit. His hair was still jet black, and he called me over in his soft, inviting voice, which, until that moment, I had not realized how much I had missed it. “Katarina,” he said. It was his pet name for me. I absolutely could not wait now to get into the truck and start helping out my uncle. There is just something about a huge truck that seems to open up endless possibilities when you are young. I kept imagining what might be in it. As my uncle and dad opened the truck and began unloading everything from it, I decided I wanted to help. My dad began telling me things to grab and ways I could help out, and I quickly got to work. I grabbed whatever my little body could hold. The dry, rough, dirty cardboard boxes began scratching up my soft tender skin. But I didn’t care about how hard it was, nor did I mind the musty smell of the truck that was now masking the spring scent of flower blossoms. In my mind, it was a lot of fun proving how grown up I was. The fact that I was capable of helping my dad and uncle, two men whom I really looked up to, was a new experience. By helping them unload the truck, I was proving to myself that I was beginning to become strong and capable like them. It was so intoxicating that I started to get carried away. I began picking up boxes that were heavier and heavier and heavier.

Right about then would probably have to be when my Great Aunt Mimi came out. I will never forget that moment. She came out in the evening as the sun was setting. It was the ending to what had to have been a perfect spring day. She was wearing her favorite dress, blue and white plaid, and she was walking out with the support of her old, beat up walker. But to be honest, I didn’t even notice her at first. I was so wrapped up in my unpacking that I didn’t know what was going on around me. That is, until her persistent waving caught my attention. There I was, standing up in the truck, with a box of miscellaneous items I had just picked up. She was right beside the truck, not threatening or anything of that nature, just simply standing there, trying to capture my attention. Little did I know what she was about to tell me.

As I was standing in the truck holding the box, she yelled at me, “Katie, honey, why don’t we leave the unpacking for the stronger men?” At first I didn’t think much about it. I just simply replied, “It’s all right. I can get it!” She wouldn’t take that as an answer. She said, “Katie, you need to come in. After all, who is going to help me make some lemonade for the men?” I was shocked by her words. Lemonade? Are you serious? Can’t they make their own? My mind began to wander thinking about the lemonade. I began to imagine the taste of a sweet tall glass. Almost immediately my mouth began to salivate. After realizing what I was doing, I quickly snapped back to reality. People have survived without lemonade, and if anyone wanted it so badly, they were fully capable of making some. Why should I give up something fun to do something so boring, like making their lemonade? I could see the slight look of disgust in her face. Her disapproval now was obvious. She was not pleased to see me working like my dad or uncle. I was even more upset and puzzled. I tried to understand why my great aunt would ask me to stop helping. After all, I was older and supposed to be taking on more responsibility.

After what seemed like forever, but probably really was only a few seconds, a light bulb finally went off in my head. I had done nothing wrong. In fact, the problem was that I was doing too much. I was a young girl trying to do a man’s job, or at least that’s how my great aunt saw it.

Looking back now, I can't remember a time where I felt more distant from my great aunt. I felt out of place, like I didn't belong anywhere. She was telling me I didn't belong working beside the men. However, I certainly knew I did not belong inside making lemonade for two men who were perfectly capable of making it themselves. My world had been flipped upside down. I was in charge of who I was and nobody else! It wasn't until later that I realized how one's environment could affect one's gender identity.

Analysis

To this day, my stomach still does a flip every time I think of what Great Aunt Mimi said to me. Not only did she ruin my fun that day, but she opened up a whole new aspect of society which I had never known. Before this moment, I had never really comprehended that society had expectations related to one's gender. I was me. I was young. Yes, I was a girl. However, I was still strong and capable. At least that's what I had always previously believed. No one had ever told me before that who I was supposed to be and how I was supposed to act was determined by my gender. I realized I was a part of society, and as a member of society, I needed to figure out where I belonged. After thinking about it, I could not help but laugh at my great aunt telling me to "leave the lifting for the stronger men" and "come make some lemonade." She was caught up in an older, more traditional culture, and was not able to see that times were clearly changing. Women were establishing their independence more and more each day, changing expectations and surpassing limitations that society had originally placed on them, leaving some women confused.

Looking back on it, of course, I was pretty torn apart when I was first informed of these "traditional" gender expectations of society. These were quite different from the expectations which I was raised with. My dad and my Uncle Tim both wanted me to help out and become independent, while my great aunt wanted the complete opposite of me. It was like I was being torn between two very different extremes with no middle ground. One side was telling me to be independent and break away from old traditional ideas. The other was telling me to stick to traditional views, relying completely on men. I found that my dad and uncle's expectations of women in society conflicted with those of my great aunt's. Rick Nauer describes this conflict in his article, "Media Influences Change in Female Roles," when he says, "Women are expected to be both more independent and ambitious and more socially connected and nurturing." The fact is that today, the identity which women are expected to fulfill in society is inconsistent and very diverse, depending upon one's environment. For me, the idea that I was expected to do something because of my gender was a new monumental idea.

I think this experience will always be remembered by me because it was a true epiphany. It ruined my day, yes, but it opened my eyes. I finally had to face reality. I had entered a new time in my life where not only was everything I thought and believed important, but so was everything else that went on around me. I realized that there was a lot more to life than I originally thought. Yes, it was important to be yourself and who you are, but it was also important to succeed in life. And in order to succeed in life, it was necessary to become a part of

society, find your place in it, and face the expectations. It didn't mean you had to accept these expectations or live by them in any way. It meant you had to at least understand they were there.

While I was listening to my great aunt talk, I learned a lot. I learned that I would and could never fully fit into a society where I was expected to be dependent upon men. I began realizing how lucky I was to have grown up in an environment and day and age where women's expectations were centered on independence. In the past it was not always this way. In fact, the movement towards women's independence really did not pick up until recently. According to writer Cynthia Harrison's article, "The Changing Role of Women in American Society," women began establishing their independence in 1920, when the Nineteenth Amendment was added to the U.S. Constitution (10). She goes on to explain the evolution of women's roles in society since the 1920's, saying, "The change in women's status in the decades since World War II has been dramatic. The right of a married woman to work outside the home is no longer in question, especially because most families with two parents depend on a second income" (12). Harrison's article proves that times are changing, along with women's roles in society. Not only were women's roles changing in the 1920's, but they are still evolving even today. My experience validated this fact. I realized that in today's society women were still seen to be weak and defenseless at times, although these expectations were changing. Thinking about the women in my own life whom I admired, specifically my mom, I realized that I did not have to be this way. Even if society was telling me to act needy and defenseless, I did not have to agree or live by it. I learned that a woman could still be a part of society today, even if she was not the stereotypical woman who followed gender expectations from the past. Even if there were these expectations, she could still be true to herself.

I am thankful for this experience. It was upsetting, but I believe it made me into the person I am today. I take pride in my abilities and would rather work by myself.

I accept help when I need it, but I challenge myself to be as independent as I can. I took what my great aunt claimed was my identity in society, considered it, and then created my own new gender identity. I learned that even though society places expectations on its members, you can still choose who you want to be. No one can force you. I saw that I was very fortunate to be where I am today, in a society which accepts the changing identity and roles of women. The truth is that we need society to survive. By creating societies, we have created certain identities, or generalizations, as to how people should fit in. Everybody is a part of society, and by being a part of society we are affected by the expectations which it places upon us. It is our duty to ourselves, as individuals, to choose to accept or form our own identity. Even though society affects who we are, it cannot determine our whole identity. We decide that for ourselves.

Works Cited

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Nauert, Rick. "Media Influences Change in Female Roles." *PsychCentral*, psychcentral.com/news/2011/04/02/media-influences-change-in-female-roles/24902.html.

Post-Reading Questions

1. What aspect of Brophy's social identity is explored in this essay? How can you tell?
2. Once Brophy has articulated something about her own identity, the Autoethnography requires that she connect that knowledge to the larger society. Where do you see Brophy making those connections in the analysis?
3. How does Brophy answer the "so what" question once she has established her social positionality? Or, in other words, what are the implications of her insight as it relates to her place in society? What will she do with that knowledge?

Keeping these types of questions in mind, please read the following autoethnography. What major differences do you see, in how the writer is using her narrative, identifying a social identity, and exploring its significance?

Claiming My Ancestry

Sophia Shaar

Sophia Shaar wrote this autoethnography in Ryan Ellis's Expos I class.

Rubbing my eyes, I stared again at the two emojis that had popped up on my screen: a man with a turban and a bomb. I had been texting a friend before I went to bed, joking casually, when he sent me those two emojis, completely unrelated to any previous text. With a sinking feeling in my stomach, I simply sent back a few question marks. Maybe it was a mistake, and he had not meant to send those two specific emojis with no other context like I was supposed to catch onto a joke. I doubted it as I lay there with my amusement from a few moments ago fading. Within a few minutes, I felt my phone buzz in my hand and checked for his response.

"What don't you get? He's from the Middle East so he's a terrorist." Just as I suspected, my friend was trying to make a "joke" that I had seen and heard many times before. Feeling unsettled, I quickly typed back a response to my friend that explained how uncomfortable I felt hearing that joke since my dad's side of the family is Middle Eastern, making me of Middle Eastern descent as well, and asked him to stop making comments like that. In minutes, my friend replied with apologies, claiming he never would have been so insensitive if he had known I had such a personal connection with the subject matter and promising that he wouldn't do it again. I

thanked him but ended the conversation quickly after that, saying I needed to get to bed when in actuality I just felt uncomfortable talking to him after that comment and decided to give it a break for a bit.

As I stayed awake reflecting upon the incident, I considered his and others' perception of Middle Eastern people—which obviously was not positive. Even though my friend apologized to me after making a racist generalization, it still did not detract from the fact that he thought it was acceptable to make such a comment in the first place. When I thought about my own attitude towards people of Middle Eastern descent, I realized that these negative opinions surrounding me had affected my viewpoints and acceptance of my heritage. I had chosen to keep that part of myself concealed for the most part in order to avoid people associating me with adverse conceptions they held about people from the Middle East.

Analysis

The conversation with my friend made me more aware of the kind of discrimination that many people of Middle Eastern ancestry face in everyday life. I likely have escaped this so far because my ethnicity is not obvious from my appearance—any observation would lead many to believe that I am only white. However, for others whose race is more distinguishably Middle Eastern, life becomes more complicated as they face generalizations, bias, and discrimination from parts of the population living in the United States. Distrusted and labelled as terrorists, people from the Middle East often alter their habits and behavior to avoid facing the prejudices of society.

While texting my friend, he had assumed I would catch his reference as if the supposed fact that all Middle Eastern people are terrorists is common, widespread knowledge. Unfortunately, though clearly false, this idea is disturbingly prevalent in our society. Most news coverage of the Middle East focuses on negative situations in that region: the war-torn countries, the fleeing refugees, and the radical groups vying for control. This obviously does not provide a complete picture of this region or the people that inhabit it; however, the negative and narrow coverage of the Middle East is often the only information much of America uses to form their opinions. And since all this coverage shows is destruction and despair at the hands of a few terrorists, people assume that this is the nature of the whole population living within the Middle East and conclude that any person from that region is also a terrorist. This ingrained perception leads to bigotry and prejudice towards people from the Middle East, causing them to tamp down some of their culture in order to avoid discrimination.

People of Middle Eastern descent sometimes feel the need to make their ethnicity less obvious to escape the attention of hostile eyes who may believe the stereotypes and generalizations made about this population. For example, many women from this culture wear head coverings such as hijabs, burqas, or scarves, but these coverings draw attention to the individuals wearing them since they are not as common in this region of the world. To prevent from bringing attention to themselves, the women “that chose, or had to, go into public would wear their scarves in a manner that could not be recognized” in order to avoid notice and, consequentially,

discrimination (Jolls et al. 5). Middle Eastern women can feel uncomfortable wearing their head coverings since they are unfortunately signifiers of their culture to unsympathetic members of society, sometimes leading to confrontation between women wearing the coverings and the people who hold negative opinions of people from the Middle East. Many people from the Middle East might also refrain from speaking in a language other than English in public, even if it's more comfortable. Speaking in another language also attracts attention from people nearby who, again, may hold unfavorable opinions of people originating from the Middle East, and so speaking only in English when in public is a precaution many people from this population take in order to avoid generating unwanted interest.

The incident with my friend made me realize how much the perceptions of society had become present in my own thinking. Of course, I was not and never had been under the impression that a whole population of people could all be terrorists. However, I know I deliberately kept the specifics of my ethnicity to myself most of the time because I had always felt that my Middle Eastern heritage was not to be shared widely with my peers. I was never ashamed of who I was or where my family was from, but a small part of me felt uneasy revealing that detail to people because I was worried about what they might think of me or my relatives. Until this incident, I had succumbed to the perception that being Middle Eastern was forbidden and unmentionable lest I wanted to be looked upon differently by my classmates or the adults I interacted with. However, now that I have come to terms with how I view my ethnicity after this incident and decided it was not acceptable, I have no issue with claiming that part of my identity publicly.

Additionally, I have grown more comfortable with my relatives' culture as a result of this incident. They have always embraced their traditions and continued to dress, eat, and speak the same after immigrating to the United States as they did back home in Syria. When I was younger and more under the influence of the perceptions of people around me because those were the most present sentiments I was exposed to, I felt slightly uncomfortable with how "different" my relatives acted. The dresses they wore, the food they cooked, and the language they spoke and watched television in were so different than the culture I was exposed to most of the time, and I shied away from labeling and including myself as the same ethnicity as them. As I grew older, however, and had experiences like the one in my narrative, I realized that I should claim my heritage because it was something I should be proud of rather than something I should feel uncomfortable expressing or seeing.

Overall, this incident raised my awareness of not only the perceptions of the people surrounding me but also my own perceptions of people of Middle Eastern ancestry. I realized that many people hold unfavorable opinions of this ethnicity, resulting from mostly negative news coverage, which leads to discrimination against people from the Middle East. This discrimination affects how the general population of Middle Eastern people residing within the United States acts as well as my own perceptions of my race. After receiving the offensive comment from my friend, I recognized the fact that I had been avoiding my Middle Eastern roots and decided to start embracing that part of my identity. Today, I am proud of my heritage and celebrate the culture that I share with my family.

Work Cited

Jolls, Heather, et al. "The View of Muslims and Arabs in America Before and After September 11th." California State University Northridge, www.csun.edu/~sm60012/GRCS-Files/Muslims-post-9-11.htm.

Activity

Finding the Right Details

Once you've chosen a productive moment on which to focus, you can utilize some strategies from the genre known as creative nonfiction, which offers essays that are factually accurate, often research-based, but with an attention to literary style. What do we mean by literary style here? Mostly this: show us more than you tell us. You want to create dramatic tension by using important sensory details. Compare the following examples:

The ceramic bread bowl that has been in my family for five generations has a **nice, reassuring** feel to it that I realize my foremothers must have felt as well.

- These "**tell**" words interpret the scene without describing it. "**Tell**" words deliver **prepackaged ideas** to the reader (pleasant, happy, depressing, annoying, pretty, etc.). Try to keep these words in balance within your narrative.

As the bowl's **smooth, solid, ceramic** interior guides my hands back to a **forming ball of dough**, I imagine my great-grandmother's hands brushing against the sides of this **same bowl** as she spent hours **kneading dough** that would be made into countless **zwiebach, bierocks**, and **verenike** for her family's sustenance.

- These "**show**" words describe a scene through sensory details and repetitious phrases. The description itself **evokes the desired effect** without requiring the writer to state it overtly.

You should notice, too, how the second example demonstrates a sense of pacing. Effective narratives center on just one moment, rather than a string of events, and provide readers with temporal details—that is, there is a beginning, middle, and an end. As you plot your experience, remember that something has to happen, even if it's not an actual physical occurrence (an accident, for example, or an argument). That "something to happen" is often what we think of as

a point of learning—an aha! moment—when we realize a powerful truth or recognize an unexpected flaw.

Activity

Writing the Plot

At this point, you should have tested a few ideas through freewriting and peer conversation and chosen your best idea for the autoethnography. You have also discussed the role of sensory details in your narrative. Now it's time to focus on the plot itself. There are many strategies that can help you move forward with your ideas. For example, you could diagram the plot using a storyboard, a visual representation of the scenes or events that make up a story. A storyboard uses sketches and words to present an outline of the story. Writers use them to map out the plot of their stories and to help them decide what details to include. Making a storyboard can also help you decide the best place for the point of learning in your story.

Follow these directions:

Make a storyboard for your own personal ethnography narrative. Be sure to include a point of learning (an “aha!” moment) as you outline your plot. If you find that your storyboard has more than five sections, you may be trying to include too many details in your story. Don't worry about the quality of your artwork. Instead, focus on using the visual structure to help you better see the arch of your narrative.

- Read your narrative carefully, looking for the point of learning.
- Divide the story into sections based on where the action is taking place and what is happening. (You will likely have four or five sections.)
- Divide a sheet of paper into sections or boxes and draw one sketch for each section of the story, using captions as necessary to support a more complex drawing.

You can also create a linear outline to diagram your narrative, following much the same pattern as the storyboard but without the sketches. For your own draft, capture the most important plot features in the order they happened, and begin to assess where the point of learning takes place.

Activity

Testing Your Narrative

Once your narrative is planned, through either the storyboard or linear outline, you should feel ready to put more words on the page by filling in the gaps between your sections. These questions might help you as write:

- What is the beginning, middle, and end of my story? How am I guiding my readers along this path? Am I using words like first, next, then, for example?
- What are the *most* important moments within my narrative? Am I including enough detail in those moments to help draw a reader's attention to them?
- If part of my narrative recalls a conversation, do I include dialogue? How can I make that dialogue sound realistic? [Note: it's almost impossible to remember conversations verbatim; you should aim for recreating the truth of the scene.]
When using dialogue, keep in mind the following conventions: --Start a new paragraph each time a different character speaks. --Place periods and commas inside the quotation marks. --Be clear about which character is speaking.
- Where does the point of learning best fit in my narrative? Do I want that aha! moment to be implied or made explicit? Why? What's the impact of either choice?

After you have completed a rough draft of your narrative, 1–1.5 pages, your instructor might ask you to bring a copy to class in order to workshop it with your peers.

Analyzing the Narrative

Of the 4–5 pages you will write for your autoethnography, at least three of them will share your analysis of the narrative by connecting your experience to a specific aspect of your social identity—usually in terms of gender, socioeconomic status, race and/or ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Often the tension that exists in the space between how we see ourselves and how society views us lends itself to significant exploration that can prove useful both in sharpening our critical thinking skills and our self-awareness. As members of an academic community, we find value in this exercise. Educational psychologists Linda Elder and Richard Paul describe it as living “in a world, both personal and social, in which every situation is “defined,” that is, given a

meaning. How a situation is defined determines not only how we feel about it, but also how we act in it, and what implications it has for us.”⁶ The autoethnography analysis encourages you to define your “situation” and articulate its meaning—both for you, personally, and for the larger society of which you are a part.

Writing as Thinking

One way to begin drafting this section is to approach your narrative with the lens of a social researcher who would ask the following questions:



- With what social lens are you going to examine your experience? (Gender? Socio-economic status? Race and/or Ethnicity?) Remember here your talk-it-out activity from choosing a topic. What were your classmates’ ideas then? What are the details in your narrative that connect most clearly to this lens?
- What is significant about this social lens? You might think about revelations of power, and/or about the purpose of the social category. For what reasons would a society want structured gender roles, for example, or a broadly defined middle-class?

Tips on Writing the Analysis

Because this is the first essay you’re writing for this course, it makes sense to talk a little more generally about strategies writers utilize to develop their ideas. When writing, you are always making choices as to how to organize your thoughts and explain your information and becoming more aware of those choices is an important step in developing thoughtful essays. Generally, it is possible to identify the different elements of an essay with the terms, exposition, example, and explanation. A sentence of exposition, for instance, establishes the purpose of an essay (like a thesis statement or controlling idea) as well provides a topic sentence for individual paragraphs

⁶ Paul, R. and L. Elder. “Critical Thinking in Everyday Life: 9 Strategies.” *The Critical Thinking Community*, March 2014. *Foundation for Critical Thinking*, www.criticalthinking.org/pages/critical-thinking-in-everyday-life-9-strategies/512.

within the essay; an example might be anecdotal or experience-based, as in the Autoethnography, or it might be discovered through outside research and be a fact, definition, quote, etc. The explanatory sentence makes connections between the example and the exposition and should make up the majority of a well-developed essay. The explanation is also the heart of your analysis section for the Autoethnography.

However, some sentences may serve more than one function, and complex sentences may do all three at once (plus provide a transition). So, be careful not to over-apply these terms. Rather than forcing you to write formulaically, these categories are meant to assist you in developing your ideas.

It's useful to be familiar with other terms for these categories: some textbooks might call exposition, "points" and examples, "particulars." A summary of an article is the points without the particulars (or the exposition without the examples). Most expressive and informative writing, however, includes much more than just your points. Generally, readers need examples (evidence) to understand your points, as well as further explanation of how you came up with your points or how your examples add up to illustrate your generalizations.

Depending on your rhetorical situation, it might be necessary to be quite explicit about your points. On the other hand, sometimes a well-chosen example speaks for itself; in fact, if you too often spell out your main point *and* offer several supporting examples, readers might be offended by the way you seem to be "dumbing things down" for them. On the other hand, if you're discussing a complex topic, readers will be frustrated if you do not slow down to explain complicated points or offer enough illustrative examples. It all depends on the interplay of topic, purpose, audience, and genre (also called the rhetorical situation).

Important Facts about Exposition. Not every paragraph has a statement of exposition. Dustin Furrey's first paragraph on pg. 53 creates a compelling picture of a big fight between the writer's parents, a big fight that led to the family's economic decline. The writer has chosen to tell the story before he offers any sentences summing up his meaning or reflecting on the significance of this event.

Some paragraphs, though, do include explicit statements of a writer's points. In Furrey's second paragraph, "I was in a working-class household that had finally achieved the lower ranks of the middle class," is a statement of exposition, following a transitional phrase ("Prior to the 'big fight'") which reminds readers of the story the writer has already shared with them.

Important Facts about Examples. As discussed earlier, examples include concrete details that offer a clear illustration of a writer's points. The sample below includes several concrete details, notably "the inescapable stench of hard liquor in the air" in the first paragraph, and "cracks along the walls" in the second paragraph. Details such as these help readers visualize the description.

Though summaries do not include specific examples, almost every other kind of writing you do will require examples. Examples are an especially crucial aspect of “open-form” writing—writing that relies on more implicit statements of meaning. In this common type of writing, examples are deployed to actually make the writer’s points; readers are expected to read between the lines in order to determine the writer’s meaning.

Important Facts about Explanation. As writers, you will need to do more than just state the points about your topic in sentences of exposition and illustrate those points in sentences which include examples. You also need to provide a broader context for your ideas by explaining how you got from Point A to Point B in your thinking: by explaining how one point relates to other points in an essay; by explaining how an experience is specifically relevant to an articulated point; by explaining the significance of an example; or by explaining what a quote means for your larger point. In the example below, the writer spends a lot of time explaining how his family’s situation changed throughout time—how they bought a house and then lost a house. While the second paragraph includes several concrete details and explicit statements of meaning, the bulk of the paragraph can be seen as “explanation,” articulating to readers how the writer interprets his family’s rise and fall—in terms of both class status and happiness.

Thus, the best writers spend a lot of time providing analysis of their ideas and examples; conversely, if you only have “explanation” that is not grounded by “examples” and “exposition,” you are likely to have written a rant—potentially a lot of grammatically fluent sentences that explore a subject for yourself without considering readers’ needs for specificity.

Activity

Activity 1: Working on Analysis

Now that you’ve drafted a possible narrative, it’s time to start testing potential analytical lenses. Remember that for this assignment, you will need to analyze how your narrative illustrates the social construction of an aspect of your identity. Testing out a number of analytical lenses can also help you determine whether or not your narrative will work for this assignment.

For this activity, you will try reading your potential narrative through a number of social lenses to see what each reveals. While you’ll choose only one for your actual analysis, trying a variety of lenses can help you choose which one is most productive for this assignment.

1. If you have not already drafted your narrative, take a few minutes to sketch out the moment. This is just a crash-through draft, so don't worry yet about things such as spelling or grammar. You're simply trying to get down the important details—the gist of this moment.
2. Once you have a brief draft of your potential narrative moment, freewrite about what that narrative moment reflects in terms of your **gender identity**. Is there anything in your story that illustrates what it's like to be a man, a woman, to be transgender (if that's how you identify)? Is there a way it reveals something about what it means to be a man in this society? About what's expected of you as a woman in this society? Even if you believe your story does not reflect something about gender, try to imagine ways that it might. Think hard. One thing that can help is to imagine if this story might have turned out differently if you were a different gender than the one with which you currently identify. In other words, if you're a young woman who wrote about learning how to make pie with your mom, how might that story be different if you were a young man?
3. Now freewrite about what the same narrative moment reflects in terms of your **racial identity**. Is there anything in your story that illustrates about what it's like to be white, for example? Is there a way it reveals something about what it means to be a white man in this society? About what it means to be a Latina woman in this society? Again, even if you believe your story does not reflect something about race, try to imagine ways that it might. In order to help, you could again imagine how your story might be different if you were a different race.
4. Finally, freewrite about what the same narrative moment reflects in terms of your **socioeconomic class** (in the most basic sense—although we'll complicate this later in the semester—socioeconomic class is about how much wealth you and your family have). Is there anything in your story that illustrates about what it's like to be wealthy in this society? Middle-class? Working class? To be worried about money? Even if you believe your story does not reflect something about socioeconomic class, try to imagine ways that it might. In order to help, try imagining how your story might be different if you were part of a different socioeconomic class.
5. Read back through your freewrites to see if any of these lenses seems particularly fruitful for this assignment. Or perhaps trying to analyze your narrative moment in

this way has led you to realize that you need a new narrative moment. If that's the case, did your freewriting spark memories of other stories that might be more productive?

Activity 2: Sketching Out Your Full Draft

Remember, the basic goal for your Autoethnography is to analyze how one aspect of your own identity is socially constructed. Social construction relies on social expectations of identity—of gender, or race, or ethnicity, or socioeconomic class, or sexual orientation. Even if we don't agree with the expectations society places on men or women or members of the lower socioeconomic class, we learn them through television, music, ads, our families, our friends, and everyday interactions. For example, those in the upper socioeconomic classes are often imagined to be educated, proper, and physically weak. Even if you do not believe that the social expectations are fair or correct (and many are not), understanding those social expectations can help us analyze the social construction of identity.

The following activity will help you clarify those social expectations of one aspect of your identity and make clearer the connections between the narrative and analytical portions of your essay.

On a separate sheet of paper, answer the following questions.

1. What identity (gender, race, socioeconomic class) are you attempting to analyze? Write it at the top of the page.
2. What are the social expectations typically associated with that identity?
3. Now how does your story illustrate a moment when you realized these social expectations? Write out a brief explanation of how your narrative moment illustrates how and why you were expected to act in a way that society imagines is true of people in your gender, race, or class.
4. If your original story *doesn't* illustrate those social expectations, then what story might you write about instead? Sketch it out.

Once you have answered these questions, spend some time (re)writing and revising your narrative and analysis, making sure to be explicit about the social expectations associated with your identity, as well as drawing clear connections between the narrative and analysis.

A Strong Foundation

Excerpt from Dustin Furrey's Autoethnography

The following excerpts from another student example will continue to help you see how a writer can make connections between the narrative and the analysis.

Dad told my sister, Kelli, and me to go to bed. The peace didn't last long. Screams soon ensued from both parents, drawing Kelli back downstairs and luring me from the safety of my bedroom. I remember coming out of my room to stand in the hallway, half hidden behind the entryway to the living room, finding Mom in an aggressive stance, as if ready to battle a fierce gladiator to the death, and smelling the inescapable stench of hard liquor in the air. In between thrown objects and the occasional slap, Mom was accusing Dad of everything from infidelity to abuse and beyond.

Prior to "the big fight," I was in a working-class household that had finally achieved the lower ranks of the middle class. We had often moved around town, until we were able to afford that house. Every other home that I can remember had cracks along the walls, rotting porches, or neighbors who were louder and visibly more abusive than my family. I was so happy to finally have my own room, after sharing one with my sister for as long as I can remember. This new house was the symbol of our new life as a family, of a better life in general.

Activity

Analysis Practice: Identifying the Supporting Details in the Narrative

In the example below (taken from Katie Brophy's essay, which you read earlier in this chapter), find the details that help us get a sense of the cultural identity this writer is exploring. The analysis section needs to explain the narrative within a larger cultural frame and we can do that by being consistent in the connections we make to the details:

She said, "Katie, you need to come in. After all, who is going to help me make some lemonade for the men?" I was shocked by her words. Lemonade? Are you serious? Can't they make their own? My mind began to wander thinking about the lemonade. I began to imagine the taste of a sweet tall glass. Almost immediately my mouth began to

salivate. After realizing what I was doing, I quickly snapped back to reality. People have survived without lemonade, and if anyone wanted it so badly, they were fully capable of making some. Why should I give up something fun to do something so boring, like making their lemonade?

What is the aspect of Brophy's cultural identity being examined here? How do you know? What specific details in this section reflect that cultural identity?

Activity

Analysis Practice: Presenting Your Information Clearly in the Analysis

What has the writer done in the example below to articulate her social identity? How does she connect her personal experience to the larger implications of rigid gender roles? What further information would you like to see her include? Why? What would that information add?

After thinking about it, I could not help but laugh at my great aunt telling me to "leave the lifting for the stronger men" and "come make some lemonade." She was caught up in an older, more traditional culture, and was not able to see that times were clearly changing. Women were establishing their independence more and more each day, changing expectations and surpassing limitations that society had originally placed on them, leaving some women confused.

Return to the page you have already drafted of your analysis and apply the analytical skills you have just practiced with Furrey's excerpt and Brophy's essay. Continue drafting, stopping at the end of each paragraph to ask:

- Where am I making clear connections to my narrative?
- When I make those connections, do I spend a few sentences explaining *what* the connection is and *how* it matters to my cultural identity?
- Where have I articulated my cultural identity?
- Where do I demonstrate my understanding of the social construction of identity? Do I explore and explain what that means to me?

You are now at the rewarding point of the writing process where you are ready to put together a full draft of the Autoethnography in order to prepare for your peer workshop. While your narrative and analysis are separate sections, you do want to provide connections between them so that the readers are more likely to understand your shared experience in the ways that you want them to. The best strategy rests on your point-of-learning: use that aha! moment to generate a controlling theme for your analysis.

Autoethnography Workshop Guide

As you may remember from the textbook introduction, peer workshops provide a valuable space for both writers and readers to develop close-reading and writing-strategy skills, and an immediate benefit of being a part of a writing community is access to generous readers, ones who take their time with our drafts and carefully offer suggestions to make our writing sharper and more fully developed. As you read through your peers' drafts, keep the importance of that role in mind. As a member of this academic community, it is your responsibility to provide helpful feedback and a focused readerly response to others' writing. Similarly, if you feel as though you are not receiving this kind of close reading and useful feedback from your peers, make sure to ask more specific questions and make the workshop work for you. While it is an instructor's responsibility to construct productive workshops, it is the responsibility of the students in the class to really make the workshop work. To begin, you should use the workshop questions below as a guide to reading and responding to your peers' drafts.

Narrative

1. Does the narrative reveal a clear sense of plot? Do you have an easy understanding of it? What is happening in the story? What do you think that story is?
2. Does this part of the essay include some kind of dramatic tension? [Consider this example of dramatic tension from Katie Brophy's essay to help you remember what that means: "By helping them unload the truck, I was proving to myself that I was beginning to become strong and capable like them. It was so intoxicating that I started to get carried away. I began picking up boxes that were heavier and heavier and heavier."] Where do you see/feel such tension in your classmate's paper?
3. Highlight for the writer your favorite sensory details and explain how they impacted you as a reader. Conversely, highlight for the writer any unclear descriptions and indicate why you find them to be so.
4. Sometimes writers can get a little "detail happy" and include so many details that it becomes overwhelming. Are there any places in the narrative where the writer might need to cut back on details or remove some descriptive words? If so, note those for the writer.

Analysis

5. What cultural identity does the writer examine? You're looking for sentences that articulate the writer's sense of self-awareness, as Brophy does here: "No one had ever told me before that who I was supposed to be and how I was supposed to act was determined by my gender. I realized I was a part of society, and as a member of society, I needed to figure out where I belonged."

If the cultural identity is not yet clearly articulated, make a note for the writer.

6. What are the supporting details that help connect the narrative and the analysis? [Remember how Brophy used making lemonade to connect her narrative to the analysis.] Do you think they are consistent and engaging?

If there are not supporting details, or if they are yet unclear, please offer some suggestions for the writer on how to add some.

7. Highlight for the writer sentences that offer *explanation* of the cultural identity—what it means to the individual and for the larger society. You're looking here for sentences that explore the implications of the writer's cultural identity, such as Brophy does when she discusses what it means to be a woman in today's society, thinking herself independent but realizing that notion is in conflict with what others expect of her.

Do you, as a reader, find the explanation sufficient in exploring the significance of this socially-constructed self? Are you left with more questions? What are they?

If you are unable to locate places that offer clear explanation, please find a place or two where you think the writer might add them.

Overall

8. List two things the writer does especially well in this draft.

9. List two things that could be improved in this draft.

What Happens Next?

Now you must thoughtfully consider your workshop feedback and revise your Autoethnography, employing revision strategies that so far you have only read about and perhaps discussed with your class. Revision entails a complete "re-vision" of your work, looking for clarity in the overall purpose and focus, and for consistent organization that supports that purpose. Once you have

looked at the big picture, you can turn your attention to the final editing and proofreading stages where you refine your word choice and correct any grammatical errors.

After you have submitted this first assignment, you can take a moment to ponder the self-reflective journey that writing has just taken you on. In the writing of this essay, you have accessed the power that “cultures provide individuals [with, a] *spatiotemporal* orientation, in which recall of past events that are associated with the self become the foundation of self-identity and self-continuity. This orientation specifies what is to be remembered about one’s past and how it influences the individual’s current and future behavior.”⁷ Hopefully you have a clearer sense of who you are as an individual amidst the context of a broad, powerful society that mitigates your choices. Carry that knowledge with you into the next discussions and written assignments, always aware of how your own sense of self is in conversation with others’ perceptions.

⁷ Cross, Susan E. and Jonathan S. Gore. “Cultural Models of the Self.” *Handbook of Self and Identity*, edited by Mark R. Leary and June Price Tangney, Guilford Press, 2003, p. 537.

Chapter 7

Handbook



Writer's Notes

One strategy you can use in your writing process is to reflect on what you have written. Making “Writer’s Notes” after you have finished writing a paper can help you to think about how you got to this stage of the writing process, what you might have done differently, and what you feel you’ve done well in writing the paper. Answering the following questions before handing in a draft of your paper can help you reflect on your writing practice and improve your process for the next assignment.

1. What went well during the writing of this paper? Why?
2. With what did you struggle during the process of writing this paper? Why do you think you struggled in this area?
3. How might you approach your next writing task to help address this concern?
4. Considering the issues we explored in this unit, what did you struggle with? Why?
5. What’s one thing you learned about yourself as a writer during this process?

Post-Grade Revision Form

If you choose to revise your essay after receiving a grade and comments from your instructor, you can use the questions below to help you begin the important work of global and substantive revision. Remember that your instructor will not comment on everything that needs to be revised. Instead, you should see your instructor’s comments as a useful starting point and as a way to begin to re-see your work. The following prompts can help you to identify patterns of concern, as well as to help make better sense of the revision comments from your instructor. Because you might need to answer these questions for each major writing assignment, you will need to write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Read through your draft and your instructor’s marginal and terminal (end) comments. What does your instructor say about the *higher order concerns* of purpose, focus, development, and organization? Instead of writing all of your instructor’s comments below, *summarize* what your instructor is saying about these areas of your essay.
2. What did your instructor identify as the specific strengths of this essay?
3. What are the three primary areas of revision that you’ll need to focus on?
4. Keeping in mind that your instructor will not have marked all of the examples of areas of concern (in other words, if she noted that you’re struggling with organization, she will not mark every place in the essay where you’re having

organizational problems), read through your draft and mark any place where you see evidence of your areas of concern.

5. How will you rewrite/restructure your essay in order to address these concerns? Remember that revision is more than simply adding a sentence or moving a paragraph. What *global* changes will you need to make and what ideas do you have for making these changes?
6. As you read through your draft, what *other* areas of concern did you identify? How will you address these in your revision?

Remembering Higher Order Concerns

As you revise, keep these higher order concerns clearly in mind.

Purpose/Focus: Do I make a single, clear point throughout my essay? Does every single aspect of my essay relate specifically and explicitly to this main idea? Does my main point meet the assignment objectives and goals?

Development: Do I clearly connect every claim, example, or subclaim to my main point? Do I have enough concrete examples to illustrate my point? Do I explain how these examples illustrate my main point? Where do I need more specific details or more explanation to clarify my points?

Organization: Does each paragraph clearly and logically follow the one before it? Does every single sentence in each individual paragraph work toward the same explicit goal? Are the connections and relationships between paragraphs clear? Are the connections and relationships between sentences clear? Where might transitional words and phrases help clarify these relationships?

Tone/Audience: Have I defined a clear audience? Where have I forgotten to consider my target audience's needs? Given my target audience, am I using the appropriate tone and level of formality throughout my essay?

Editing

Once you've rewritten your essay and addressed the higher order concerns above, you can now think about editing for grammar, punctuation, typos, errors, and conventions. Remember to set your revised draft aside for at least 24 hours before editing. One of the best ways to catch such errors is to read your essay out loud.

The Three-Ex Guide to Developing Your Ideas

Deborah Murray

Employing the “3-Ex Strategies”—Exposition, Example, Explanation—helps writers figure out which aspects of their essays need more development. Often, a novice writer may have lots of examples, but she may not have provided any articulation of points and subpoints. This reliance on facts without any framework of ideas is especially typical of papers including research. An over-reliance on source information results in the infamous “data dump.”

The three-ex guide is not intended to serve as a means of organizing or outlining an essay. Instead, it should help writers figure out which areas of their essay need development. I came up with this scheme in working with writers in the Writing Center and in my classes.

These terms came to me as I was helping one writer (“Christine”) with her research paper on sleep. She had neglected to determine the main points of these sources, so she relied on quoting a few fascinating facts. All of these facts were loosely related to the topic of sleep, but few of them were related to her overall claim. To demonstrate this problem to my student, I scheduled a conference. I shared with her the graphic (Exposition, Example, Explanation).

Using three highlighters, I explained what each of these aspects was, and then handed the highlighters to Christine. With the help of the highlighters, she discovered that her paper was mostly pink (examples). She had some exposition (yellow) at the beginning and end of her essay, but she had no explanation (blue). And, of course, the reason that she didn’t have explanation is that she could not explain how the quotes supported her points, because they did not. In fact, in some cases, there were no claims (exposition) there for her facts (examples) to support. By highlighting her own essay, Christine could see the essay’s problems.

Her original draft was a data dump, containing lots of examples from her sources. Christine went back to the drawing board. She collected (with my help) a couple more sources from newspapers. These new sources were relevant to her essay’s point, and now it was easier for her to find relevant support in two of her original sources.

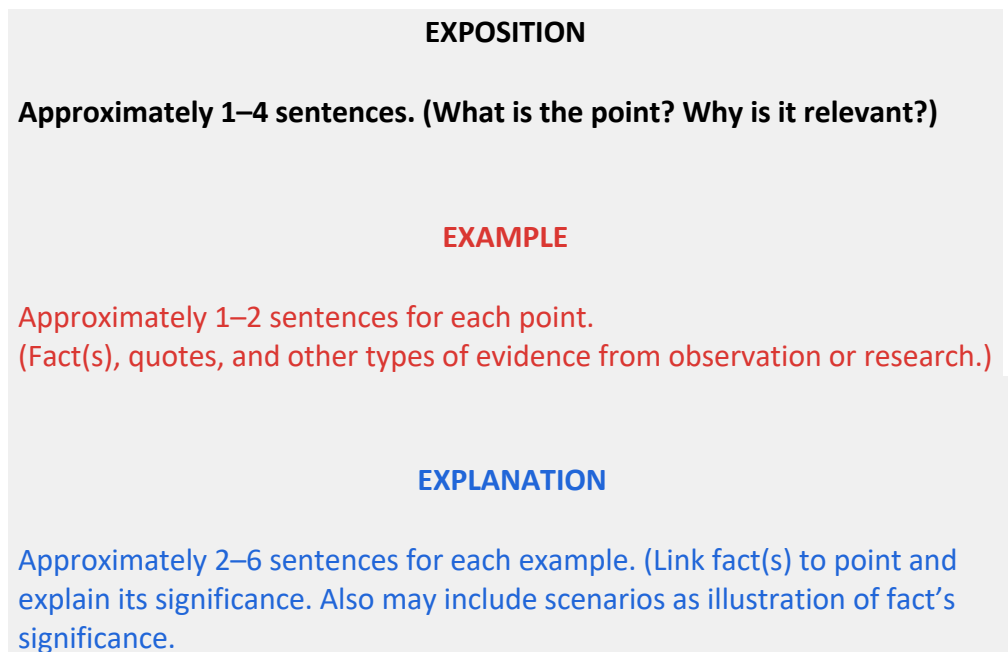
Christine learned that even though she was required to use research for this paper, the bulk of the essay should be her own writing: stating her claims, then explaining how the quoted material supported her claims. *Most* of the essay should be exposition (yellow) and explanation (blue), with the examples (pink) only in support of her points.

I introduce this color-coded chart to demonstrate to novice writers a way to develop their essay. Many paragraphs have at least one sentence for each of the three categories: exposition, example, and explanation. Of course, experienced writers will produce paragraphs which (when analyzed and highlighted) display much more complicated color schemes: Sentences that are

green and purple as the colors blend together. Students can strive to achieve this more complex style, but for most beginning writers, I'm quite satisfied with style reflected by the three basic colors. The most developed paragraphs, when analyzed and highlighted, are mostly blue.

These terms do not need to appear sequentially; in fact, some paragraphs may lead with example. Other paragraphs may not include explicit exposition. Some paragraphs are primarily transitional, so they may not have all either exposition, examples, or explanation. No on-size-fits-all rule exists for paragraph development. Use these terms as a strategy—not a stencil.

Here is a visual representation of the Three-Ex Strategies:



Exposition Sentences State Your Claim(s) or Subclaim(s)

They introduce ideas and tell readers why your ideas are important. Sometimes this type of sentence might be called a “topic sentence,” “main point,” or even a “thesis statement.” While not every paragraph requires an explicitly stated point, many types of writing do require that you have explicit statements of exposition. When highlighting paragraphs within your essay, think of exposition sentences as yellow (bold and italic, here).

Example: *The text in the ad indicates the importance of physical appearance.*

Example Sentences Provide Support for the Exposition

Your support might come from research, from close reading of a text you are responding to, or from your own experience and observation. Generally, you should have at least two examples

for every major point of exposition in your essay. When highlighting paragraphs within your essay, think of example sentences as pink (red here).

Example: The answer in the pink box reads, “I love my mother, but I don’t love her thighs.”

Explanation Sentences Explain How Your Example(s) Illustrate Your Exposition

These sentences show readers how you got from Point A to Point B. How exactly do your examples support your point? Also, how does a paragraph’s point relate to previous points made? How do you define important terms of your discussion? When highlighting paragraphs within your essay, think of explanation sentences as blue.

Example: This answer stresses the idea of maintaining what the woman considers to be a positive physical appearance—thin thighs.

Open Versus Closed Form: Determining the Most Appropriate Structure for an Essay

In school, most of us learn a variety of rules for organizing our writing. While some of these rules can be helpful, not all rules suit all writing tasks. And, in fact, the more proficient you become as a writer, the more restrictive you may find these rules. What may be more useful is a set of criteria to consider when determining what the most effective organizational strategy for an essay might be. Here is a brief discussion of the two broad categories of organization—“open” and “closed.”

A type of organization called “closed form” may be the one you’re most familiar with. The five-paragraph structure you may have learned to follow for timed writing situations is an example of this type of form. In a five-paragraph essay, the first paragraph (often called the introduction) introduces a point and three subpoints; each paragraph develops one point, and the conclusion restates the previously discussed points. This structure can be quite useful to help you organize your ideas, but it can also be fairly repetitive and restrictive. What if you only have one central point, but you need several paragraphs to present it fully?

Most documents using closed form are less restrictive than the five-paragraph essay. The most common feature of closed form writing is that the opening paragraph gives readers a clear statement of the essay’s central point. This thesis claim can be read as a promise—one that readers will expect be fulfilled in the subsequent paragraphs. In closed form, most paragraphs have a topic sentence (though it may not be the first sentence in the paragraph). Generally, all sentences in each paragraph are specifically related to the topic sentence. A closed form essay’s conclusion sums up the points under discussion; for a short essay, these points may not need to

be reiterated systematically, but in a longer essay, an essay's conclusion does restate the essay's claims point by point. Most standard academic writing employs closed form structure.

Open form organization—as its name implies—is less rigid than closed form. This type of essay still needs to be focused and developed, but it is less structured. Rather than relying on an explicit statement of points, this type of essay relies on detailed, memorable examples—often from the writer's personal experience or observation. Also, open form prose makes use of figurative language and appeals to the reader's senses in its specific use of detail.

Most essays employ both open- and closed-form features. For example, in open form writing, a writer may still occasionally be explicit about a central point. Also, in closed form writing, a writer may include some personal examples and detailed descriptions. Also, not every paragraph in a closed form essay has to be presenting a point. For example, some paragraphs may be transitional. Also, writers using both kinds of organizational structures may use a short paragraph to get readers' attention in order to emphasize an important idea or detail.

The chart below gives you a number of criteria to consider when determining the most suitable organization for a writing task. The boxes are checked based on the most suitable form for each consideration. Each rhetorical situation will have a variety of constraints to consider, so it is helpful to practice making your own choices about each writing task's organization.

Criteria	Open Form	Closed Form
Reader is likely to be suspicious of or doubtful of writer's points and information shared (so personal experience or hypothetical examples may help draw readers in).	✓	
Reader is likely to be welcoming of or open to writer's points and information shared.		✓
To your target audience, your personal opinion on a subject is more important than the factual information provided in your essay.	✓	
To your target audience, the factual information provided in your essay is more important than your personal opinion on a subject.		✓
Your readers are likely to enjoy (and perhaps be influenced by) an individual approach to a subject.	✓	
Your readers expect a predictable, straightforward approach to a subject.		✓
Your target audience appreciates subtlety; if you state your points directly, they will feel preached to.	✓	
Your target audience includes busy professionals who need to be guided by explicit statement of your points.		✓

Punctuation Made Simple¹

Gary A. Olson

Some people write well but allow themselves to be disabled by a fear of punctuation and grammar. They know how to prewrite, organize, and revise, but proofreading for punctuation and grammar causes them difficulties. There's no need to fear these conventions of standard written English. In fact, these conventions can help you become a more effective communicator.

Punctuating Your Prose

Before discussing specific punctuation marks, we want you to know one important fact: punctuation is simple. Many people believe that punctuation rules are rigid commandments and that only the "experts" know all the rules. You may be surprised to learn, however, that it is not the "experts" but rather educated speakers and writers, such as yourself, who have established the practices that we know as the "rules of punctuation." In other words, over the years good writers have used punctuation in ways that have made their messages especially clear to their readers. Writers have agreed to follow these practices because they have proved to be so effective.

As an analogy, think of the traffic signs that govern the rules of the road. When you see a red blinking light or an octagonally shaped red sign, you bring your vehicle to a full stop; when you see a blinking yellow light, you proceed with caution. These traffic rules help make driving safe and efficient. But there's no reason why a red blinking light signifies a complete stop; it well could have been any other color. The caution light, too, could very well have been another color. The important fact to remember is that drivers have agreed to follow these signals and to do certain things when they come upon them. The same is true with punctuation marks. Writers have agreed that certain marks will signify things in written communication.

The rules of punctuation are not static; they have changed throughout the years and will continue to change. What once might have been considered improper punctuation may now be considered correct. The rules of punctuation are created and maintained by writers to help make their prose more effective, and their exact meaning changes through time, just as traffic rules evolve with time. (For example, in many states it is now acceptable to make a right turn at a red light if no other vehicles are in sight.) At any point in time, a particular punctuation mark means what writers agree it means; as consensus shifts, so will its meaning.

If you approach punctuation with this understanding of its origin and flexibility, you will not be intimidated by the conventions of punctuation.

¹ Olson, Gary A. "Punctuation Made Simple." lilt.ilstu.edu/golson/punctuation/.

In the panels that follow, we discuss several of the most useful punctuation marks that you will use as a communicator. Instead of listing many rules as a grammar book might, we discuss these various marks in general so that you can get a sense of how to use them in your own prose. Of course, every communicator should own and use a grammar handbook as a reference tool. You will still want to refer to such a book when you come upon a particularly difficult punctuation problem. Here, however, we are most concerned with helping you develop a feel for the way punctuation works. We begin with the easiest of these marks and move to the most difficult.

The Colon

You might be surprised to learn that the colon is one of the most helpful and easiest to use of all the punctuation marks. You don't need to remember six or seven rules to understand how a colon works. In prose, a colon really does only one thing: it introduces. It can introduce just about anything: a word, phrase, sentence, quotation, or list. You'll notice that we have used colons in the two preceding sentences to introduce a sentence, in the first case, and a list, in the second case. This is how simple the colon is. Let's look at some other examples:

Joe has only one thing on his mind: profit.

Joe has only one thing on his mind: his stock portfolio.

Joe has only one thing on his mind: he wants to get rich.

Joe has only one thing on his mind: stocks, bond, and certificates of deposit.

We have used a colon in these four sentences to introduce various kinds of things: a word, a phrase, a sentence, and a list. You can use a colon in your prose in any place where you must directly introduce something. A colon gives special emphasis to whatever you're introducing because readers must first come to a stop, and so they pay more attention to it. For example, let's say you are writing a letter describing a product, and you want to emphasize above all that this product, a Jacobsen lawn mower, is reliable. You could very well write:

The Jacobsen lawn mower beats its competitors especially in the key area of reliability.

While this sentence gets the point across, it doesn't place much emphasis on reliability.

A sentence using a colon is much more emphatic:

The Jacobsen lawn mower beats its competitors especially in one key area: reliability.

Notice that the second example places clear emphasis on the point that the writer is trying to communicate to his or her reader: that the Jacobsen lawn mower is above all reliable. The writer of this sentence has used the colon effectively.

Perhaps the most common way to use a colon is to introduce a list of items, as in this sentence:

This report reviews five main criteria to determine whether to purchase the IBM PC: hardware, software, maintenance agreements, service, and customer support.

If you aren't sure whether you need a colon in a particular sentence, here is a handy test: read the sentence, and when you reach the colon, substitute the word *namely*; if the sentence reads through smoothly, then there's a good chance that you do need a colon. For example, you can read any of the example sentences above with the word *namely* in the place of the colon:

Joe has only one thing on his mind (*namely*) profit.

Joe has only one thing on his mind (*namely*) his stock portfolio. Joe has only one thing on his mind (*namely*) he wants to get rich.

Joe has three things on his mind (*namely*) stocks, bonds, and certificates of deposit.

This test may not work 100 percent of the time, but it is a fairly reliable indicator of whether you need a colon.

One word of caution: do not place the colon after the verb in a sentence, even when you are introducing something, because the verb itself introduces and the colon would be redundant. For example, you would not write:

My three favorite friends are: Evelyn, Marlyne, and Ronni.

The colon is not necessary in the sentence above because the verb does the work of introducing the three friends. You can check this sentence by using the test we just mentioned. It would seem awkward to read this sentence, "My three favorite friends are, *namely*, Evelyn, Marlyne, and Ronni." The fact that the sentence is awkward when you read it with *namely* is an indication that the colon is unnecessary. Remember, the colon shows emphasis and, therefore, you want the reader to stop at the colon before proceeding on to whatever it is you are introducing.

The Semicolon

The semicolon is another important tool you can use when you write. There are two ways to use this punctuation mark: as a connector between two sentences and as a supercomma.

1. To Connect Two Sentences

The semicolon is most often used to connect two sentences. Obviously, the sentences ought to be relatively close in content, but other than that you can connect any two sentences with a semicolon. The diagram below may help you remember this usage:

Sentence ; Sentence

As a communicator, you are always putting together complex ideas in your prose and showing how they relate to one another. A semicolon is an economical way to join two sentences, and therefore two ideas, so that your reader sees the relationship. For example, you may write any of the following sentences:

Jim is a good typist; he makes few mistakes.

The MFC Corporation is an excellent company to invest in; its dividends have risen sharply and steadily over each of the last ten years.

Ms. Sanchez is a good real estate salesperson; however, she was unable to sell her own house.

Each of the three examples above contains two sentences glued together by a semicolon. The second part of each sentence makes a comment on the first. Certainly, each sentence could be written as two sentences, but you wouldn't be expressing the close relationship between the two parts that you do when you use a semicolon. With two separate sentences, the reader must stop at the period of the first sentence and then begin to read the second; with two sentences connected by a semicolon, the reader does not come to a full stop and, therefore, the relationship seems that much closer. Also, this type of sentence allows you to express your ideas economically.

The important point to remember is that you must have a complete sentence on both sides of the semicolon. If your second sentence begins with a conjunction (and, but, or, etc.), you do not need a semicolon because the conjunction and the comma that usually goes with it are equivalent to a semicolon. Instead, combine two full sentences with the semicolon.

Sometimes a sentence may begin with words like however, therefore, and nevertheless. If your second sentence begins with one of these words, and if it is indeed a full sentence, you still must use a semicolon to connect the two. The sentence about Ms. Sanchez illustrates this use.

A word of caution: never glue two sentences together with only a comma. Grammarians call this sentence error a comma splice. Here is an example of two sentences connected with only a comma:

The banking community became quite upset at the rise in the prime rate, bankers felt that they would ultimately lose a considerable amount of money.

A comma splice is considered ungrammatical because the reader begins reading the second sentence before realizing that the first sentence is completed. Readers are used to stopping at the end of a sentence, and they become disoriented when they find that they have unknowingly left one sentence and entered a new one. This is why effective writers avoid the comma splice. Here are two additional examples of comma splices:

Ms. Lincini is a fine worker, she meets all her deadlines.

Our sales have increased by twenty percent, our inventory has been reduced by thirty percent.

Each of the examples above constitutes two sentences glued together with a comma. You can correct a comma splice by inserting a semicolon between the two sentences, by adding a comma to your conjunction, or, of course, by punctuating them as two sentences. Whichever way you choose, however, you must make sure your final drafts do not contain comma splices.

There is one instance in which a comma splice is considered acceptable. Occasionally, you may have a list of items that could stand alone as full sentences. You may use commas to attach these items so long as it is clear to the reader that this is a list of relatively equal items. Here is an example:

I opened the safe door, I took out the money pouch, and I concealed it in my desk drawer.

The example above shows a list of three items and illustrates a step-by-step process. Even though the items all constitute full sentences, it is acceptable to use commas to attach them but only because they are members of a larger list. If you are unsure about using commas to connect sentences in a list, perhaps it is best to rewrite the sentence. Do, however, stay alert for any two sentences in your prose that are connected by only a comma.

Related to the comma splice is the run-on sentence. Run-on sentences, often called fused sentences, are two sentences punctuated as if they were one. In other words, a run-on is a comma splice without the comma—two sentences smashed together with no punctuation between them. Here are two sample run-ons:

*Chu Lie is the foreman Joseph Garcia is the line boss.
I knew that the new personnel policy would cause problems the union is reacting quite vehemently.*

As you can see, each of the two samples is composed of two sentences. The writer should have connected the sentences with a semicolon or punctuated them as separate sentences. Again, you don't have to worry about such matters until the proofreading stage, but you must make sure your final draft doesn't contain run-on sentences.

2. As a Supercomma

As you know, you normally separate the members of a list with commas, as in this sentence:

I have just bought shares in IBM, USAG, and ITT.

The commas let the reader know where one item ends and the next begins. Sometimes, however, you have a list of complex items and one (or more) of the items already contains a comma. In such a case, the reader is likely to get confused about what is really a member of the list and what is not. You can avoid this confusion by making the semicolon a sort of "supercomma." Look at the sentence below to see how the supercomma works:

Suncom Corporation has subsidiaries in four cities: New York, New York, Wilmington, Ohio, Houston, Texas, and San Francisco, California.

This sentence contains so many commas, both between the members of the list and within them, that readers are likely to become confused. Instead, you can make the semicolon a supercomma between each of the members so that your meaning is clear:

Suncom Corporation has subsidiaries in four cities: New York, New York; Wilmington, Ohio; Houston, Texas; and San Francisco, California.

The second sentence is clearer than the first because the reader knows exactly where members of the list begin and end. You probably will not need to use a semicolon as a supercomma often, but if your sentence contains a list of items, one (or more) of which already contains a comma, you can clarify your meaning by using the supercomma.

The Comma

The comma tells the reader to pause, just as the blinking yellow light tells a driver to slow down and to proceed with caution. Some writers can tell where a comma is needed by reading their prose aloud and inserting a comma where there seems to be a clear pause in the sentence. This may work much of the time if you read the sentence carefully and accurately. However, this procedure is not the most precise way to approach comma usage. Below are four general ways to use commas with a reasonable degree of certainty.

1. Between Items in a Series

When you are listing three or more items in a sentence, simply place a comma between each member of the list. Here are two examples:

Mr. Sanchez used the money that he won from the sweepstakes to buy a house, a car, and a small yacht.

We will purchase the stock if the price is lowered to \$30 per share, if we are allowed to buy a block of over 10,000 shares, and if we receive a guarantee that no new shares will be created in the next fiscal year.

The commas clearly mark where one member of the list leaves off and the next one begins. There is no mystery in how to use the comma in these kinds of sentences. What is often unclear, however, is whether to include the comma between the last and second-to-last items in a list. In the past, it was considered improper to omit the final comma in a series, but modern writers believe that the conjunction (and, but, or) does the same thing as a comma: it marks the place between two items in the set. These writers have argued that a sentence is more economical

without an unneeded comma. As a result, you now have the option to choose whether to include the final comma. Nevertheless, many people still follow the old rule and expect to see the final comma. Also, if your list is rather complex, omitting the comma may confuse the reader about where the second-to-last item leaves off and the last begins. In this case, of course, you would want to include the comma in order to avoid confusion. Perhaps it is best to get into the habit of always using the comma between the last two items in order to avoid all controversy. You do, however, have the option to omit it.

2. Between Two Sentences

You'll remember that a semicolon is used to connect two sentences. However, more often we glue two sentences together with a comma and conjunction (such as *and* or *but*). In fact, if you examine a document you have written recently, you are likely to find many such sentences; they are so common that you don't even realize you are writing them. When you do put two sentences together with a conjunction, you must also include a comma. That is, the conjunction and comma are equivalent to a semicolon when you're connecting sentences. Here are three examples:

The Suncom Corporation has just acquired the OILCO company, and it has agreed to sell OILCO's oil-drilling rights in Texas as soon as possible.

I knew that the price of IBM stock would increase after it entered the home computer market, but I had no idea that the price would skyrocket.

I first conducted a thorough audit of the company, and I then interviewed the manager to try to determine how much money was missing.

Each sentence above is made up of two sentences glued together with a comma and conjunction. For example, the first sentence is made up of the following:

The Suncom Corporation has just acquired the OILCO company.

It has agreed to sell OILCO's oil-drilling rights in Texas as soon as possible.

All you need remember is this: when you're connecting two sentences with a conjunction, you must also include a comma because the conjunction and comma work together as a team.

Perhaps this diagram will help you remember:

Sentence , Conjunction Sentence

Often you may use a conjunction but not have a complete sentence on both sides of it. In this case you do not need a comma. For example, you could easily rewrite the above sentences so that one part of each sentence is not a full sentence:

The Suncom Corporation has just acquired the OILCO company and has agreed to sell OILCO's oil-drilling rights in Texas as soon as possible.

I knew the price of IBM stock would increase after it entered the home computer market but had no idea that the price would skyrocket.

I first conducted a thorough audit of the company and then interviewed the manager to try to determine how much money was missing.

Because in the above examples you do not have full sentences on both sides of the conjunction, there's no need to include a comma.

One last bit of advice: if your sentence is very short (perhaps 5 to 10 words), you do have the option of omitting the comma if you wish. You have this option because your reader can usually understand a short sentence more readily than a long one, and therefore you would not need a comma for readability. Here is an example:

Mr. Santana is old and he is senile.

This sentence is so short that you may omit the comma. Remember, punctuation is meant to help the writer and the reader, not to make their jobs more difficult. That's why you may opt to omit the comma between these two short sentences.

3. To Attach Words to the Front or Back of Your Sentence

Most of the sentences we compose really consist of a short core sentence with many details added to that core sentence. Frequently, we add information to sentences by attaching one or more words to the front or back of the core sentence. You don't need to memorize seven or eight rules naming each of the different structures you can add to your sentence. Instead, remember that when you add information to the front or back of a sentence, you want readers to know that you are doing so, in order to help them clearly understand your message. Here are four examples:

Certainly, Joan is a successful salesperson.

Although she flunked chemistry and barely passed math, Joan is a good student.

In order to help save the company from bankruptcy, we sold shares in the company at discount prices.

Joan is a good student, although she flunked chemistry and barely passed math.

If you examine the sentences above, you will see where the writer has attached words to the front or back of each core sentence. Even when you add one word, such as certainly in the first example, you want your reader to know where the real sentence begins. This is why you place the comma there. If you read the sentences carefully, you'll also notice a natural pause where the comma is situated.

4. On Both Sides of a Nonessential Component

The three uses of the comma just discussed are quite easy. You should be able to tell when those commas are needed or not. When you are proofreading your own prose, it will be clear to you whether you have a list of items or not, whether you are attaching two sentences with a conjunction or not, and whether you are tacking words onto the front or back of your sentence or not. The fourth use of the comma, however, is a little more complex because you must make a judgment call. Nevertheless, even this fourth way to use a comma is relatively simple.

Often, you will insert a group of words into the middle of a sentence. Sometimes this group of words will need to be set off by commas from the rest of the sentence, and sometimes you will not need commas. In order to tell whether you need commas, you must make a judgment about whether the added words are essential to the meaning of the sentence or whether they simply provide extra detail. Let's use an analogy to illustrate this concept. The modern stereo system is what we call a component system, in that it is made up of many different components: an amplifier, receiver, turntable, tape deck, and various speakers. With most stereo systems, you have the option of removing certain components and adding new ones. For example, you may decide to unplug your tape deck but retain the turntable. The various components are optional or nonessential to the system itself. Similarly, you often add or delete components from your sentences. If a component (a group of words in this case) is added to a sentence but does not affect the meaning of the sentence when it is removed, then that component is not essential.

In order to tell a reader that a group of words is a nonessential component, you place commas in front and in back of the group of words. However, if omitting the group of words would drastically change the meaning of the sentence, then those words are not a component; rather, they are essential to the meaning of the sentence. In that case, you would not want to put commas on either side of the component so that the reader knows that those words are absolutely important to the meaning of the sentence. For example, look carefully at the following sentences:

Ms. Johnson, who is the company president, will present the awards at our annual dinner.

Banks which hold over a billion dollars in assets are rare.

In the first sentence, the information about Johnson being the company president has no bearing on the main idea of the sentence: that she will present the awards at the annual dinner. Since this information is added or extra, we let the reader know it is an interchangeable component (like the stereo's tape deck) by placing commas on either side of it. In contrast, the second sentence contains information that is absolutely essential to the meaning of the sentence: "which hold over a billion dollars in assets." If you were to place commas around these words, you would be erroneously telling the reader that the words constitute a nonessential component. For example, look at this sentence:

Banks, which hold over a billion dollars in assets, are rare.

This sentence tells the reader that the main idea is that "banks are rare." Certainly, banks are far from rare, but by enclosing the information in commas you have said that they are. Although we've spent some time discussing this use of the comma, it isn't very difficult to master. Simply remember that when you are proofreading you should check your sentences for essential and nonessential components.

The Dash

The dash—typed as two hyphens side by side with no space between the dash and the words on either side of it—is used to connect groups of words with other groups. Generally, the dash does this in two ways: it separates words in the middle of a sentence from the rest of the sentence, or it leads to material at the end of a sentence.

As you know, writers often place a component in a sentence and set the component off with commas. Sometimes, however, you might wish to place special emphasis on the component, but commas are too weak to serve this purpose. If this is the case, you may wish to use dashes for added emphasis. For example, look at these two pairs of sentences:

1. *Linda Simpson, the president's most trusted economic advisor, will resign her office during today's press conference.*
2. *Linda Simpson—the president's most trusted economic advisor—will resign her office during today's press conference.*
3. *Simpson's prescription for the economy, lower interest rates, higher employment, and less government spending, was rejected by the president's administration.*
4. *Simpson's prescription for the economy—lower interest rates, higher employment, and less government spending—was rejected by the president's administration.*

All four examples are correct, but numbers 2 and 4 place more emphasis on the component within them because of the dashes. Also, you have probably noticed that number 4 is much

clearer than number 3 because the dashes clearly mark where the component begins and ends, whereas the reader might become confused by all the commas in number 3. In other words, you can use the dash to make sure your reader clearly understands your point.

In addition, you have an added advantage when using dashes over commas: you can use a full sentence as a component. For example, examine these sentences:

Linda Simpson—her enemies call her the author of our nation’s economic woes—has resigned her office with the present administration.

The present economic condition—Linda Simpson calls it an economic disaster—will require stringent fiscal measures before improving.

Notice how economical your sentence is when you can interject another entire sentence into the middle of it. Combining sentences in this way accentuates the relationship between the ideas and helps you draw attention to the component within the dashes.

You can also use a dash to attach material to the end of your sentence when there is a clear break in the continuity of the sentence. Here are two examples:

The president will be unable to win enough votes for another term of office—unless, of course, he can reduce unemployment and the deficit simultaneously.

Generally, the president’s economic policies have proved ineffective—although, it’s true that he has lowered inflation considerably.

These two samples show how you can attach added material to the end of your sentence.

Use dashes sparingly—only for those occasions when you wish to show special emphasis. They can help you communicate effectively in certain situations, but you don’t want to clutter your prose with too many of them.

The Apostrophe

An apostrophe is a signal telling the reader that a word is either a possessive or a contraction. As you know, a contraction is simply two words contracted into one. You use contractions most often in informal or personal types of writing but usually not in more formal types. When you speak, you use contractions every day. Here are some common contractions:

can't	cannot	won't	will not
don't	do not	we're	we are
it's	it is	you're	you are

The apostrophe in the contractions above tells the reader that you have omitted a letter or two from the word—o in three of the cases above. Undoubtedly, you have already mastered contractions, so we won't go into detail. However, we will mention one common mistake. Remember that the apostrophe marks the missing letter. Don't make the common mistake of placing the apostrophe between the two words, such as in these cases: shouldn't, do'nt, etc.

The apostrophe is also used to mark the possessive. The possessive tells the reader that someone or something owns or possesses the thing that comes after the possessive. Here are five examples:

Ronni's word processor	the nation's GNP	the banker's log book
the year's end	the bank's holdings	we're

The possessive noun in each of the examples above (Ronni's, banker's, bank's, nation's, year's) indicates to the reader that something is owned by something or someone else. In most cases, to make the possessive you simply add an 's to the end of the noun. This is quite easy. The problem arises when a noun is both plural and possessive. Certainly there can be more than one Ronni, and they both can own the word processor. Or more than one banker can own the log book. In such cases, you simply place the apostrophe after rather than before the s:

Ronnis' bankers' banks' nations'

Some writers become confused when they must make a possessive of singular nouns that already end in s. As usual, you make the possessive by adding 's to the word; however, some writers and editors argue that the two s's are redundant and that therefore you can eliminate the second s, ending up with the s'. That is, they argue that there is really no need to include an s after the apostrophe, since the apostrophe already tells readers that the word is possessive. Others argue that you should drop the final s only on words of several syllables but retain it on short words. Since there is no agreement on this difficult problem, you must make your own choice. However, regardless of which option you choose, do remember to be consistent. Here are three nouns which already end in s and their corresponding possessive forms:

James	James's	James'
Jones	Jones's	Jones'
class	class's	class'

Finally, the apostrophe is used in one other way. Although the apostrophe is never used to make a word plural, it is used to make letters and numerals plural:

Although I received C's and D's in many of my college classes, I always received A's in my business classes.

My sister received straight A's throughout her college career.

My ROTC marksmanship score showed that I had six 5's and three 4's.